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JESUS CHRIST RE-INTERPRETED WITH SOME REFLECTIONS FOR THE ASIAN SYNOD

Edited by
Augustine Mulloor

JEEVADHARA

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

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Edited by

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EDITORIAL

There are also many other things which Jesus did; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25). This is the end-comment of a redactor after his attempt to interpret the person and mission of Jesus. He was saying that everything has not yet been written. He was also saying, attempts have to continue to understand the mystery of Jesus Christ. We become unchristian and unfaithful disciples when we pretend, "we have already seen": "If you were blind you would have no guilt; but now that you say 'we see', your guilt remains" (Jn 9:41). A Christian community is "knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". (Col 2:2-3). Go on searching, seek uninterruptedly, and never cease knocking is the life style of a christian. The result is the voyage of exploration with new vistas constantly opening up through new questions arising from new situations, new links previously unobserved surfacing themselves, nuances hitherto overlooked getting highlighted.

We have models of such explorations and reinterpretations in the Bible. Historical studies and critical researches have shown that the gospels were not intended to be biographies but are rightly catalogued kerygmatic histories. Then we find such attempts at further reinterpretations in other parts of the New Testament too. In this issue of *Jeevadharma*, we try to delve into this area to find normative models not only of the content but also of the very method and process of reinterpretations of the Kerygma for particular contexts.

The contributions point to the Christological reinterpretations in the letter to the Hebrews, Catholic Epistles and the Book of Revelation written by Augustine Mulloor, Rui de Menezes and Paddy M. Meagher respectively. This creative phase in the early Christian communities' experience of Jesus Christ who suffered, died and rose again, articulated in completely new language and figures of speech, challenges us today as the norm in our praxis. The last article by J. Constantine Manalel contains reflections on extremely important topics for discussions at the forthcoming Asian Synod of Bishops.

Augustine Mulloor

CHRISTOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

Tracing back the models of Christological reinterpretations in the pluriform literature commonly accepted as Catholic Epistles, Rui de Menezes, concludes that a comprehensive treatment of Christology cannot ignore the Catholic Epistles. After noting the leading streams in "traditional Christology" the author develops in comparison with them, the apocalyptic and pre-existent Christology, both positive and antichrist-ology and anti-gnostic christology, both negative.

1.00 Introduction

Christology has unfortunately been treated as an overview of the understanding and interpretation of Christ in the different periods of the history of the Church. No doubt this is but one aspect of the study. But the question Jesus asked of his disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi, which remains the basis of all Christology, was double-barreled, first, "Who do *people* say that I am?" (Mk 8:27) and second, "Who do *you* say that I am?" (Mk 8:29. Italics ours). For Christians normative Christology is to be found in the New Testament writings but as ecclesiastical history teaches us the great theologians of the Church and the Magisterium have in unison also produced christology that is normative for the Christian believer. A classical example of this is the early Church Council of Chalcedon. But one must not forget that they always based themselves on and set themselves the task of interpreting the New Testament canonical writings in their own specific Greek context.

The task assigned to us is that of expounding the christology of the so-called seven Catholic Epistles. These are James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude. Now the problem facing us is that not all of these writings are "catholic", that is, addressed to the universal Church, nor are they all "epistles", for some seem to be theological tracts and have no semblance of an epistle. Thus **James** is addressed "to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (Jam 1:1). **Jude** similarly is addressed "to those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:1b). So too **2 Peter** has

as its addressees "those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1b). These three seem to qualify for the title "catholic". Whereas the remaining four writings pose problems, **1 Peter** is directed not to all Christians but only to those who find themselves as "Exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1), all within the area of modern Turkey. **2 John** according to most modern commentators¹ is addressed to a particular local church who is addressed as "the elect lady" (2 John 1) or simply as "lady" (2 John 5). **3 John** is a short letter written to a particular individual called Gaius (3 John 1). Finally **1 John** seems to be a theological tract as no addressees are mentioned, but in the guise of an epistle². The conclusion which would usually contain greetings to the addressees just has a warning, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). They hail from different times and are written by different authors. **1 Peter** is generally accepted as genuine but written by Peter through the agency of Silvanus and so could be dated to just before 67 CE³. The last of the writings seems to be **2 Peter** and dated around 130 CE⁴. The others could be placed within these two dates. Hence one cannot look for homogeneity or uniformity of views. All the same there are themes and aspects that these writings have in common and others which are specific to each writing.

Thus our study will consider in the first section what we call **traditional christology** parallels to which can be found in the genuinely Pauline writings⁵ and the Synoptics which basically treat of the salvific functions of Jesus the Messiah. We shall then proceed to the section on **apocalyptic christology** which will treat of christology

1. Cf. J. Schneider, *Der erste Brief des Johannes* in Neues Testament Deutsch 10, *Die Kirchenbriefe*, Goettingen 1967, P.181. See also G.B. Caird, "John, Letters of", *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by G.A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962.
2. *Ibid.* p. 131
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, *Der erste Brief des Petrus*, p. 39.
4. Cf. E.M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude and 2 Peter*, The Century Bible, Thomas Nelson, Edinburgh, 1967, p.99.
5. Under these we include seven: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Corinthians and Romans. We exclude Hebrews, Pastorals, Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians. Regarding the last as Marxsen says: "Als Paulus- Brief bereitet der 2 Thess auf jeden Fall mehr Schwierigkeiten als als nicht paulinischer Brief", *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Guetersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Guetersloh 1963, p. 44.

as influenced by apocalyptic literature. This section will have an excursus on what could be called **antichrist-ology**, which is exclusively found in the so-called Johannine literature with parallels in the deutero Pauline epistle of 2 Thessalonians⁶. The third section will deal with **pre-existent christology**, classical examples of which are to be found in the Gospel of John and in the deutero Pauline literature, specifically Colossians and Ephesians. The fourth section will treat of what could be called negative christology, that is **anti-gnostic christology**, initial stages of which are to be found in the genuinely Pauline literature and whose more developed form is to be reflected in the Gospel of John.

2.00 Traditional Christology

We call this christology "traditional" because it reflects the most ancient type and such as is found in the genuine epistles of Paul and in the Synoptic Gospels. It deals basically with the salvific work of Jesus Christ who is given the titles of Saviour and Redeemer. Hardly anything peculiar to the Catholic Epistles is to be found in this section except possibly the title of *parakletos* or "Advocate" which is applied to Jesus in the First Epistle of John and that of "Shepherd" which 1 Peter has in common with John's Gospel.

2.01 Christ as Saviour

That YHWH saved Israel from the bondage of Egypt belongs to the earliest dogmas of Israel's faith. As the Song of Moses, one of the earliest pieces of Old Testament literature has it, "The LORD (that is YHWH) is my strength and my might and he has becomes my salvation!" (Ex 15:2). And Deutero Isaiah, the prophet and poet of the Second Exodus, that is from the captivity of Babylon also portrays YHWH as a Saviour: " And Israel is saved by the LORD (that is, YHWH) with everlasting salvation!" (Is 45:17). And again even more clearly, "Was it not I, the LORD? There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour" (Is 45:21b). Now the New Testament uses the epithet "Saviour" for God the Father as well as for Jesus Christ (cf. Tit 1:3-4; 3:4-6). In the Catholic Epistles, Jude reserves the title Saviour (*soter*) for the only God (Jude 25) but 2 Peter applies it five times to Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Pet 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). Salvation is not understood as salvation from bondage to other human beings

6. See previous footnote

like Egyptians, Assyrians or Babylonians as in the Old Testament, but to sin, corruption and the defilements of the world (cf. 2 Pet 2:9-20). The First Epistle of Peter as well understands salvation through Christ as a freeing from the bondage of sins (cf. 1 Pet 1:24). Elsewhere the author of the Epistle tells us more explicitly that Christ took away our sins on the cross (1 Pet 2:24). 1 John seems to have resolved the contradiction as to who is our Saviour, God or Jesus, by stating that God the Father has sent Jesus his Son as the Saviour of the world (cf. 1 Jn 4:4) much in the way YHWH had sent Moses and later on the judges to save Israel.

The idea of saviour (*soter*) was also in vogue in the cult of the Roman emperor⁷ and so was known both to Jews as well as Gentiles. This explains the presence of this word in Luke's Gospel in the context of the proclamation made by the angels to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (cf. Lk 2:11) and that of the Samaritan woman where her compatriots tell her that they had discovered for themselves that Jesus is the "Saviour of the world" (cf. Jn 4:42).

2.02 Christ as Redeemer

Intimately connected with salvation is the idea of redemption. Though we often use the two indiscriminately as synonyms there is a difference between the two concepts. Redemption implies more than salvation because a redeemer (*go'el*) is a member of the family of the one being redeemed. John's Gospel does show that Jesus became a member of our family when he says that the Word of God pitched his tent among us (cf. Jn 1:14) or when he tells us that "he came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). Similarly the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that God is the Father both of Jesus and ours as well. That is why he says, Jesus was not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters (cf. Heb 2:11). This distinction is not made in the Catholic Epistles. Here we are merely told that Jesus redeemed us. 1 Peter tells us that we have been sanctified by the Spirit and sprinkled by the blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:2). Further he tells us that we were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our ancestors not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without

7. Cf. R.J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 50, Word Books, Waco Texas, 1983, p. 169.

defect or blemish" (1 Pet 1:18-19). Blood in the Old Testament stands for life. In other words Christ gave his life in exchange for ours. And so elsewhere we are explicitly told that "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God" (1 Pet 3:18).

2.03 Christ as Expiation

Closely connected with the idea of redemption is that of expiation. We see how already in the Old Testament a certain amount of spiritualisation had already taken place. From the idea of YHWH redeeming the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt in the Book of Exodus it passes to the idea that they are redeemed from their bondage to sin in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 16). As the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us for expiation blood is essential (cf. Heb 9:22). In the Old Testament rite of atonement the *kapporet* (mercy-seat) was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificial victim (cf. Lev 16:15ff.). In the New Testament Christ himself is called *hilasterion* (which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *kapporet*) by Paul. When translated it is given as "sacrifice of atonement" (cf. Rom 3:25). Literally it is the "mercy-seat" where expiation takes place. And so *hilasterion* came to mean "expiation". Now in the Catholic Epistles only 1 John treats of this theme. However the author uses *hilasmon* (abstract) rather than *hilasterion* (concrete) when he tells us that God sent his Son to be the expiation (*hilasmon*) for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10. See also 1 Jn 1:2). The connection between blood and expiation is shown by 1 John in the following text: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). And again: "Jesus forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:10). And one of the main purposes why Christ came into this world is to take away sins (cf. 1 Jn 3:5).

2.04 Christ as Advocate

The idea of Christ as Advocate once again is typical of 1 John and is not found anywhere outside this epistle. The English word "paraclete" for "advocate" is taken directly from the Greek and is equivalent to our forensic term "pleader". In the Gospel of John this term is applied to the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7), whereas in 1 John it is applied to Christ: "if any one does sin Jesus Christ the righteous is our Advocate (*parakletos*) with the Father" (1 Jn 2:1). The contradiction whether the Christian can sin or cannot sin is left unresolved in this epistle. Sometimes we are told, as in the last text, that the Christian

does sin. But elsewhere he says that if we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar (cf. 1 Jn 1:10). The author contradicts himself when he makes the following astounding statement: "Those who have been born of God *do not sin*, because God's seed abides in them; they *cannot sin*, because they have been born of God" (1 Jn 3:9. Italics ours). Here not only the fact of sin is denied but even the very possibility of sinning! Is this now an ontological statement, that is, a statement of fact, like the one to be found in 2 Peter whereby the Christian becomes a partaker of the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4) or merely an ideal placed before the Christian? The latter seems to be the case for even in 2 Peter the very next verse tells the Christians to make an effort to support their faith with goodness, that is kindness, and so on (cf. 2 Pet 1:5ff).

2.05 Christ as Model

In John's Gospel Jesus after washing the feet of his disciples tells them that his action was a model, an example (*hypodeigma*), for them to follow (cf. Jn 13:15). In the Catholic Epistles this word is not used in this context. All the same Jesus' life is vividly portrayed as a model for the believers in Christ to follow. Thus 1 John says: "By this we may be sure that we are in him; whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk as walked", that is to behave as he behaved (cf. 1 Jn 1:6). 1 Peter places Jesus before the eyes of the Christian as a model for suffering unjustly without abusing or threatening to retaliate. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example (*hypogrammon*), so that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21).

2.06 Christ as Shepherd

In the Old Testament the king of Israel was supposed to be the shepherd of God's people. In fact the text which mentions the call of David clearly reflects this idea (2 Sam 7:8). This was the common cultural heritage of the Semitic people for already Hammurabi the king of Babylon called himself the Shepherd of Babylon in the second millennium BCE. But the real shepherd of Israel was YHWH himself as a late psalm tells us: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!" (Ps 80:1). In fact this became a practical necessity after the Exile when kings ceased from Israel. But already the prophet Ezekiel had found fault with the kings of Israel for not having shepherded the people of Israel (cf. Ezek 34). In the post-exilic

age Deutero Isaiah speaking in the name of YHWH will tell us, "He will feed his flock like a shepherd" (Is 40:11). John's Gospel takes up this theme and makes Jesus say, "I am the Good Shepherd!" (Jn 10:11).

In the Catholic Epistles it is 1 Peter that expressly calls Christ the "Shepherd and overseer of our lives" (2:25) and again "the chief shepherd" (1 Pet 5:4). In particular Peter calls upon the elders of the Church, who even today are called "pastors" to tend the flock that is in their charge with unselfishness and meekness and to be themselves examples (*typoi*) for the flock (cf. 1 Pet 5: 1-3)

3.00 Apocalyptic Christology

To a large extent if not exclusively the traditional christology mentioned in the first section of our paper was based on the Old Testament. This section dealing with what we call apocalyptic christology draws its inspiration largely from the literature that is called apocalyptic, whose ultimate roots no doubt go back to the prophet Ezekiel, the father of Apocalypticism, but whose immediate roots are to be found in the only apocalypse that is included in the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel. All the rest of the apocalyptic literature has been considered apocryphal, that is non canonical, by both the Church and Judaism. It is usually pseudonymous in character and is sometimes called pseudepigraphical. It was born in a setting of persecution and hardship. In the words of George W.E. Nickelsburg, "One important factor that holds together the largest part of this corpus of literature is its common setting in hard times: persecution; oppression; other kinds of disaster; the loneliness and pressures of a minority living up to its convictions in an alien environment"⁸. Thus Jewish apocalypses were born after or during the crisis of the Babylonian captivity, the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the time of the Maccabees and finally after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Whereas Christian apocalypses originated during or after the persecution of the Christians by the Romans during the reigns of Nero and Domitian. Questions of theodicy may have been the driving force for the writers of this literature to reflect on history and seek a vindication of the innocent sufferer at the hands of a righteous God.

3.01 Development of Christian Apocalypticism

It is not easy to decide what the stance of Jesus was regarding the

8. Cf. *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah*, SCM Press, London 1981, p.5.

Parousia and the end of the world which the apocalyptic writers represented. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus that are preserved in the Synoptics have been reinterpreted by the evangelists. At any rate Jesus was conscious that he was ushering in the new age when he proclaimed the nearness of the kingship of God (cf. Mk 1:15). Whether the Marcan Apocalypse (Mk 13) is from Jesus, the early Church or from Mark himself is an open question. Probably all three had a hand in it. The New Testament surely claimed that Jesus was the Messiah who ushered in the kingship of God. These writers also believed that Jesus the Messiah who had come in humility, who was put to death in the most ignominious way, would come again in glory, now that he was raised from the dead by the Father (cf. Rom 4:25).

Paul in any case believed in the imminent return of the Lord probably in his own lifetime (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-5:11). In Mark's Gospel too the Parousia is awaited in the not too distant future (cf. Mk 13). But as time went on the Christians realized that this was not to be. Luke himself pushed the Parousia into the future (cf. Lk 21:8. See also Lk 19:11). Even more clear is 2 Peter, who all the same insists that the promise of the Lord has not been cancelled (cf. 2 Pet 3:9ff.). And so the early Christians fervently prayed for the coming of the Lord as can be seen from 2 Corinthians and the Apocalypse of John, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Apoc 22:20; cf. 1 Cor 16:22).

3.02 Meaning of the Term *parousia*

According to H. K. McArthur *parousia* has different connotations depending on the type of literature where the word appears. Thus in Classical and Koine Greek it means both "presence" as well as "arrival" or "coming". The same is the case in the usage of the Septuagint. In the Hellenistic literature the term was frequently used for "the official visit of a ruler or the epiphany of a deity"⁹. But the eschatological usage of the term for the return of Jesus seems to be a creation of the early Christian community as is reflected in eighteen of the twentyfour instances of the word in the New Testament. He further tells us that the phrase "second coming" (of Christ) does not occur until Justin Martyr¹⁰.

9. Cf. "Parousia" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed., by G.A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962.

10. Cf. *Ibid.*

3.03 “Parousia” in the Catholic Epistles

In the earliest of these Epistles, that is **1 Peter**, the original idea of the proximity of the parousia seems to be reflected. Thus we are told that “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Pet 4:7). According to him the early Christians were living “at the end of the ages” (1 Pet 1:20). And yet the “day of visitation” (*hemera episkopes*) that is, of judgement, was still to come but when exactly he does not tell us (cf. 1 Pet 2:12).¹¹ Elsewhere he tells us that “the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Pet 4:17).

James exhorts the faithful to “be patient until the coming of the Lord” (Jas 5:7) and a little later almost innocently states that the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord is at hand” (Jas 5:8). Indeed the judge is standing at the door! (cf. Jas 5:9). This day is supposed to be a “day of slaughter” for the wicked (Jas 5:5) and he exhorts the rich to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming on them! (cf. Jas 5:1). The treasures which they have stored up by exploiting the poor will only serve as witnesses for the last days of their unchristian behaviour (cf. Jas 5:3). Apparently there was no problem in his community regarding the belief in the Lord’s imminent return.

1 John tells his faithful that in order not to be put to shame at the coming (*parousia*) of Christ they should abide in him (1 Jn 2:28). He further assures them that it is the last hour since many antichrists that are renegade christians, have already come (cf. 1 Jn 2:18).

No other Catholic Epistle treats at such length of the problem regarding the parousia as **2 Peter**. It is variously called “day of judgement” (2 Pet 2:9; 3:7), “day of the Lord” (2 Pet 3:10) and once “day of God” (2 Pet 3:12). The phrase “day of the LORD” (*yom YHWH*) appears for the first time in the prophet Amos and he refers to it as to something with which the Israelites were already familiar, because he himself gives the phrase a diametrically opposite meaning. It will no longer be a day of light, that is of victory, but rather a day of darkness

11. The translation “day of visitation” appears in the RSV but the NRSV has changed to “glorify God when he comes to judge” (1 Pet 2:2) but the older translation is preserved in a footnote. In the Old Testament the Hebrew verb *paqad* “to visit” has both the positive meaning of God as coming to save or help as well as the negative meaning of God coming to inspect, judge or punish the evil-doer Cf. Jenni/Westermann, *Theologisches Handwoerterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Kaiser Verlag, Muenchen 1976.

and defeat (cf. Am 5:18-20). The phrase reappears in the apocalyptic literature and in the writings of the Covenanters of Qumran as a day of victory for Israel but a victory obtained through the intervention of God himself. In the New Testament it refers to the parousia or the second coming of Christ in glory. But the punishment of the wicked and the enemies of God is of course included as we are told in the present epistle: "But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless" (2 Pet 3:7)¹². And in fact in one instance he uses the two words together when he says that we should be "waiting for and hastening the coming (*parousia*) of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:12). The Greek word rendered by NRSV as "hastening" is *speudontas* which can also mean "strive after".¹³ **2 Peter** is exhorting the believers to live in such a way that they prepare themselves diligently for the day of judgement so that they might not meet with destruction but with glory, the glory that will be conferred on them by Christ.

But the main theme of this epistle is the controversy about the delay of the parousia of Christ that was sparked off by the intruders whom the author of the epistle calls "false teachers" (2 Pet 2:1). They are the "scoffers"¹⁴ whose appearance in the "last days" was foretold by the apostles and the prophets of the New Testament (cf. 2 Pet 3:3). This is how they argued when they denied the parousia of Christ. "Where is the promise of his (Christ's) coming (*parousia*)? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" (2 Pet 3:4). The author of the epistle has no sympathy for these false teachers whom he calls "irrational animals" and "mere creatures of instinct" who make our Lord into a liar and one faithless to his promise. He compares them to Balaam whom he calls greedy and mad since they too forsook the straight road and followed

12. The idea of the destruction of the world by fire is unique to 2 Peter and occurs nowhere else in the Bible. Its origin seems to be Babylonian or Persian but is also found among the Stoics. cf E.M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude and 2 Peter* (see footnote 4), p.120.

13. Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957.

14. The "scoffers" (in Hebrew *lesim* or *anshe lason*) are mentioned in the Book of Isaiah (Is 28:14) and Proverbs (Pr 21:24; 29:8). The verb "to scoff" is found in Is 28:22. They would correspond to our cynics or agnostics who have no room for God.

the road of Balaam (cf. 2 Pet 2:14-15). Making use of the Epistle of Jude he says, that they are “waterless springs and mists driven by storm, for them the deepest darkness has been reserved” as punishment (2 Pet 2:17; Jud 11-13). He says that it is by the “word of God” that the universe (heavens and the earth) came into existence; by the same word the old universe was destroyed by water and by the same word the present universe is reserved for destruction by fire (2 Pet 3:5-7) after which the new universe will be created “where righteousness is at home” (2 Pet 3:12-13).

He counters their teaching about the alleged delay of the Parousia with three arguments. First of all he says, there is no delay at all, for “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and thousand years are like one day” (2 Pet 3:8). Secondly, he says the alleged delay does not imply slowness on the part of the Lord in keeping his promises. It is not without purpose that he repeats the word “promise” three times (2 Pet 3:4, 9,13; cf. 1:4). On the contrary God is exercising patience and thereby giving the believer a chance to come to repentance (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). Finally he quotes a saying of Christ wherein he had said that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief” suddenly and unexpectedly (2 Pet 3:10; cf. Mt 24:43-44; Lk 12:39-40; 1 Thess 5: 2- 4).

He concludes his argument by exhorting his hearers that their reaction to all this should not be like that of the false teachers that is, indulging in cynicism, agnosticism or unbelief. On the contrary they should lead lives of holiness and godliness as they look for the fulfilment of the Lord’s promises and earnestly desire the coming of the Lord (cf. 2 Pet 3:11-12).

3.04 Christ’s Descent into the Underworld

What we refer here as “underworld” corresponds to the “realm of the dead” or the *She’ol* of the Old Testament, which the LXX renders as Hades, as for example in the quotation of Ps 16:10: “For you do not give me up to She’ol, or let your faithful one see the Pit”, which is found in Act 2:27 where it is applied to Christ and given as proof-text for his Resurrection. That Christ “descended into hell” is an article of faith as is found in the Apostles’ Creed, only that recently the Church has changed “hell” which was a rendering of Hades to “descended to the dead”. The myth of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar who descended into the Underworld is known from the Akkadian literature. The Mandaean religion and the Hellenistic Mystery Religions speak of gods or goddesses descending into Hades. Behind this myth may be

the phenomenon of the Sun setting in the West which was thought of as a descent into the underworld.¹⁵

What the Church would like us to believe is that Jesus really died and this we have from the New Testament. The Synoptic Gospels tell us not only that Jesus was crucified but even mention that he was buried. In particular the Gospel of John and the Johannine Letters stress this against the Docetists who denied that Jesus came in the flesh (cf. 1 Jn 4:2; 2 Jn 7) by insisting on the fact that Jesus really died on the cross. And to make sure that he did die we are told that the centurion even pierced his side with a lance and hence did not break his legs (Jn 19:32-34). For the Gnostics and the Docetists Jesus merely went into a swoon on the cross. He did not really die for Spirit that he was, he could not die!¹⁶

Now in the New Testament we find a few texts that refer to Christ's descent into She'ol but none of them treats of the subject at length. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the Abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) (Rom 10:7). Very similar to this is the text from Ephesians: "When it says (Scripture), "He ascended", what does it mean but that he has also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things" (Eph 4:9-10). John in the Book of Revelation has a vision of Jesus, "one like the Son of Man" who says to him, "I am the first and the last and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades" (Apoc 13:17-1).

None of these texts really describes Christ's descent into Hades. That is left exclusively for the author of **1 Peter** to do! He seems to have based himself on the apocryphal **First Book of Enoch**, sometimes known as the **Ethiopic Book of Enoch** (Henoch). Of course the words apocryphal or canonical came to be used much later when the Canon of the Scriptures was already closed. But in the initial

15. Cf. J. Schneider, *Die Kirchenbriefe*, Neues Testament Deutsch 10, Goettingen 1967, Excursus on *Die Hoellenfahrt Christi* (Christ's Descent into Hell), pp. 78-79.

16. For the connection of Docetism with Gnosticism see J. Knox "Docetism" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed., by G.A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1962.

stages different local churches had recourse to different books for use in the liturgy as well as for nourishing their piety. According to D.S. Russell¹⁷ this book was originally written in Aramaic, and according to J.H. Charlesworth¹⁸ in either Hebrew or Aramaic or in both like the Book of Daniel. However it is extant only in the Ethiopic version which itself is a translation from a Greek version! This book is not to be confused with the **Second Book of Enoch** or the **Slavonic Book of Enoch** also known as the **Book of the Secrets of Enoch**.

The Ethiopic Book of Enoch is a composite book with five parts (like the Pentateuch or the Book of Psalms) each of which might have been circulating independently, possibly coming from different authors and put together by a final redactor who wrote the first chapters of Introduction. According to Charlesworth "it is hardly possible to understand any aspect of the religious tradition and thought of Ethiopia" without having recourse to the Book of Enoch.¹⁹ The first five part (ch. 6-36) sometimes called the **Book of the Watchers**, "concerns the fallen angels, their intercourse with women (Gen 6:1-4), their corruption of all men, Enoch's unsuccessful intercession on their behalf, a prediction of their doom, and various visions of Enoch during a tour of the earth, Sheol, and heaven".²⁰ As Russell tells us: "Enoch, in a vision, makes two journeys. In the first he visits the place reserved for the punishment of the angels (17-20), and in the second he views Sheol and the ends of the earth (21-36)".²¹ This last is the source for 1 Peter's description of Christ's descent into *She'ol* (cf. 1 Pet 3: 18ff.). Let us now quote the text from our Epistle. He tells us that Jesus "was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation (*ekeryxen*) to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah during the building of the ark...." (1 Pet 3: 18b -20). In the next

17. Cf. *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, SCM Press, London 1964, p.51.

18. Cf. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1983, p. 6, where he says: "Some scholars believe that the original language of 1 Enoch is Hebrew; others however, think it is Aramaic; still others contend that the book like Daniel was composed partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic".

19. *Ibid.*, p. 10

20. *Ibid.*, p. 5

21. *Op.cit.*, p. 32.

chapter we are told: " But they (the sinners) will have to give an accounting to him (Jesus Christ) who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was proclaimed (*euengelisthe*) even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does" (1 Pet 4:6).

It is not clear whether in the third chapter the author is speaking about the fallen angels who had been kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness in the lower parts of the earth (cf. Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4) or of the contemporaries of Noah who refused to believe in him, " the herald of righteousness" (cf. 2 Pet 2:5) as is also attested in the Jewish Haggada ²², or of both. What is important is the contrast that is being made between Enoch and Christ. For whereas the former proclaimed condemnation to the fallen angels that were chained in the lower parts of the earth, Christ is announcing the good news of salvation (*euengelisthe*) to the dead (cf. 1 Pet 4:6). The theme of the descent of Christ into Hades will be taken up by **Pastor of Hermas** and **Ignatius of Antioch**²³ where Christ announces the good news to the patriarchs and holy men of the Old Testament and even to the Gentiles. The development will go in the wrong direction as in the **Apocalypse of Peter** where the description of the torments in hell are vividly described or in the **Gospel of Nicodemus** ²⁴ where we are told how Christ harassed the denizens of hell. Finally because of these ludicrous developments the theme of the descent of Christ into Hades will be gradually abandoned and the Church will insist on the fact that Jesus really died.

But as far as the Catholic Epistles are concerned this theme is important on two counts. First of all if the Risen Christ has been given

22. Cf. J. Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 104. According to Schneider Noah appears as a preacher of penance or repentance (*Bussprediger*) for the first time in the Jewish Haggada, which is an interpretation of non legal biblical texts.

23. Both these are early Christian and so obviously cannot be sources of New Testament works but show what direction later interpretations took.

24. What was said in the previous footnote is applicable here as well.

authority over the whole universe, as 1 Peter and the Gospel of Matthew tell us (cf. 1 Pet 3:22; Mt 28:18), Christ's supremacy over She'ol cannot be left out of consideration²⁵. Secondly it is also a question of theodicy whereby the justice of God is demonstrated by giving the generations that lived before Jesus a chance to take a stand for or against Jesus in all freedom. The generations that are to come after Christ will be evangelised by the disciples of Jesus (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19; Jn 7:20).

3.05 Excursus on Antichrist-ology

The Greek word *antichristos*, "Antichrist" appears only in the so-called Johannine epistles and nowhere else in the New Testament (cf. 1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn 7). The plural *antichiristoi* "antichrists" appears only once in 1 Jn 2:1. The term "Antichrist" seems to be a Christian invention but the idea itself "is very much earlier and probably reflects a well-established and fully developed legend familiar to the writers of the apocalyptic books".²⁶

Closest to this concept of the "Antichrist" is the mysterious "Lawless One" (*ho anthropos tes anomias*) from the Pauline Corpus (cf. 2 Thess 2:3). Scholars have found parallels to the Antichrist in Persian Dualism where Ahriman or Angra Mainyu (Demon of Darkness) wages constant war against Ahura Mazda (God of Light)²⁷. It is possible that the War between the Sons of Light and the Sons of

25. In Mathew's Gospel the Risen Jesus says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Mt 28:18). "Heaven and earth" in Hebrew stand for the whole universe even though the universe was composed of three parts (heaven, earth and she'ol) according to Hebrew cosmology. On the other hand the hymn in the Epistle to the Philippians says that God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him a name that is above all other names, so that all beings in heaven, on earth and in the underworld (tripartite universe) should pay homage to him (Phil 2:9-10). Now whether the hymn is an original composition of Paul or belongs to the tradition of the early Church makes no difference. All this is ultimately based on the Book of Daniel where God (the Ancient of Days) confers an eternal kingship on "the Son of Man" (cf. Dan 7).

26. Cf. D.S. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

27. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 276 -20 where there is a whole section on "Antichrist". See also M. Rist: "Antichrist" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed., by G.A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1962. Further see J. Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-149.

Darkness in Qumran derives from this. Obviously in Jewish tradition God (Yhwh) triumphs over the Devil. In later Christian tradition God does the fighting but it is the Archangel Michael who does the fighting while God presides as the umpire! All the same it must not be forgotten that already the prophet Ezekiel, the father of apocalypticism, speaks of the mysterious Gog, king of Magog, who along with his hordes wages war against God but is finally defeated (cf. Ezek 38-39; Apoc 20:8).

According to Russell "the earliest reference to this idea of Anti-christ in the apocalyptic writings is in the Book of Daniel, where he is identified with Antiochus Epiphanes"²⁸. In the **Psalms of Solomon** he is identified with the Roman general Pompey where he is called "Dragon"²⁹. And so in some cases he is identified with the Devil or Beliar (Belial)³⁰ and in others with a historical figure, normally that of an oppressor of God's people. In later Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature he will be identified with the emperor Nero³¹, the persecutor of the Christians while at the same time taking on the mythical traits of the Dragon or the Snake who is identified with the Devil or Satan (cf. Apoc 12:9).

In apocalyptic eschatology there will be signs that precede the end of the world, important among them, the appearance of the Antichrist under whatever name it be. John's Gospel too speaks of Jesus casting out the "Ruler of this World" (Jn 12:31). In the First Epistle of John we are told: "Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour" (1 Jn 2:18). Here antichrists are identified with renegade Christians. As elsewhere it is explained: "Who else is the **liar** (*pseustes*) but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the **antichrist**, the one who denies the Father and the Son" (1 Jn 1:22). What is called "**liar**" (*pseustes*) in the First Epistle

28. Cf. Russell, *Op. cit.*, p. 277

29. See *Ps. Sol.* 2:29 and *Ibid.*,

30. The correct form is Belial which in Hebrew literally means "useless", from *bal* "not" and *ya'al* "use". But soon it came to denote someone reprobate or dissolute. The word appears in the New Testament (2 Cor 6:15) and corresponds to what we call Devil or Antichrist. See T.H. Gaster: "Belial" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. (See footnote 16).

31. Cf. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

of John will be called “**deceiver**” (*planos*) in the Second: “Many deceivers (*planoi*) have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver (*planos*) and the antichrist!” (2 Jn 7).

Whether one calls him antichrist, liar or deceiver, whether one identifies him with a historical or a mythical figure, what is important to keep in mind is that the apocalyptic writers who have created or perpetuated this myth, are grappling with what “Paul” calls “the mystery of lawlessness” (cf.2 Thess 2:7: *mysterion tes anomias*). The paramount question which poses itself to us when we are confronted with evil in the world is: Where does evil come from? And this becomes more acute in the face of the suffering of the innocent! And this is precisely what the Jews experienced in the humiliating episode of the Babylonian captivity under Nabukadrezzar, in the relentless religious and political persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, and what the early Christians suffered under the religious intolerance of the Roman emperor Nero or Domitian. But all these writers had this in common that final victory would be God’s whether they called him Yahweh or the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. These writers consoled the faithful and exhorted them to face these trials which God was sending them to test their faith as they awaited in hope the arrival of their God or his Messiah, that is Christ. And so the Christians prayed: *Marana tha*, that is: “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22) or again: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Apoc 22:21). And the reply in Christ’s name was given by the apocalyptic John: “Surely, I am coming soon!” (Apoc 22:20b). And as Jesus had warned his disciples: “If anyone says to you at that time, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah (*christos*)’ or ‘Look! There he is! -do not believe it. False Messiahs (*pseudochristoi*) and false prophets (*pseudoprophetai*) will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything” (Mk 13:21). But he also reassured his disciples that for the sake of the elect he had cut short those days of anguish, that is of waiting for his Parousia, the day of reckoning for all the forces of evil (cf. Mk 13:20).

4.00 Pre-existent Christology

The general impression among students of Christology is that “ascent christology” as represented by the Synoptics is earlier than the “descent christology” as represented by John (Cf. Jn 1:1-18; 3:31; 6:38,51) or in the Deutero Pauline Epistles to the Colossians (of. Col

1:15; 2:9) and Ephesians (Cf. Eph 4:10). But already Paul in the Epistle to the Philippians represents the so-called "descent christology" when he says: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, when he says: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave being born in human likeness" (Phil 2:5 -7; cf. 2 Cor 8:9)³². Similarly in the Catholic Epistles too we have texts which represent both ascent and descent Christology. And so one must be careful to avoid any generalisations or sweeping statements regarding the dates for the ascent or the descent christology. There are texts which to use later Church terminology, show both the human and the divine nature of Christ. Thus Christ is for us the link between God and human beings. This the New Testament has shown admirably by calling Jesus "Son of God".

4.01 Ascent Christology

Let us for a moment look to the genesis of the christological problem and then pass on to consider how the early Church reflected on all this and gave expression to it through its credal formulas to say nothing about the later christological dogmas of the Greek Church. It all began with the proclamation, the teaching and the ministry of Jesus with his healings and exorcisms. There can be no doubt about the impact the personality of Jesus had made on his earliest disciples. They realized that he taught as one having authority and not like their own scribes and teachers of the Law (cf. Mk 1:22,27). He had absolutely no human respect (cf. Mk 12:14) nor did he care for adverse consequences his doctrine might have for his own person (cf. Lk 13:31-33). Exorcisms and cures that Jesus performed were such that they provoked the highest admiration from the on-lookers (cf. Mk 1:2; 2:12 and *passim*). When he called unknown persons to follow him his hypnotic personality left them no choice but to leave everything and everyone and follow him (cf. Mk 1:1, 20; 10:2). The calming of the storm over the Lake of Gennesareth shook them out of their wits and made them wonder who indeed Jesus might be (cf. Mk 4:41). But it is the experience of the Risen Lord that really convinced them that here was someone more than a human being and they surrendered

32. It makes no difference whether we ascribe the hymn to Paul or to the early Christian Church. In either case it is earlier than John's Gospel, and so is one of the clearest examples of an early date for "descent christology".

their whole beings to Him so that they were ready to lay down their lives to give testimony to him (cf. Act 5:41). And so it is not without problems to say that the acknowledgement of the divinity of Jesus Christ was not made by the early disciples but by later generations of his disciples. What is late is the explicit christology.

4.02 Christ as Divine

And so we must realize that the early New Testament writers did make some statements concerning what we could call the divinity of Jesus. Naturally coming as they did from a Jewish background of monolithic monotheism they were hard put to reconcile the divinity of Jesus with that of Yhwh the God of their ancestors. And so the most obvious category from the Old Testament that lent itself to them was that of "Son of God". The same thing could be applied to the "Spirit" as the Old Testament had spoken of the "Spirit of God" already on its first page. Here are the beginnings of the specific Christian trinitarian monotheism. This is mostly though not exclusively stressed in the Johannine literature. Thus we are told in the **1 John**: "God sent his only Son (*ton monogene*) into the world so that we might live through him" (1Jn 4:9). On the other hand we are also told that "the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8). Who besides God could do this according to the Old Testament and the Apocalyptic writers? And again the writer of 1 John who insists that no human being can avoid sinning tells us in most express terms that " in him (Jesus) there is no sin! "(cf. 1 Jn 3:4) and that is why Jesus could appear to take away sins" (cf. 1 Jn 3:5). And finally the author tells us that it is God who has "borne witness to his Son" (1 Jn 5:9). Similarly too the writer of **2 Peter** speaking in Peter's name says: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses (*epopta*) of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory saying : 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'" (2 Pet 1:17) In other words the author is making clear to us that the divine Sonship of Jesus is not a fabrication of his (Peter's) but is based on God's testimony which is in perfect harmony with what 1 John had said. And no wonder that James calls Jesus Christ "the Lord of Glory" (Jas 2:1). One must keep in mind that in the Old Testament "glory" (*kabod*) is always associated with Yahweh. This is specially true of Ezekiel (cf.Ezek 1:28; 9:3; 10: 4-5, 18; 11:22f;

39:2) and of the Priestly Author in the Pentateuch (cf. Ex 16:7,10; 24:6; 40:34f; Lev 9:22-24; Num 16:19; 17:8/16:42). Another important text which reflects pre-existent christology is that of **1 Peter**. He too insists that Christ already existed before his appearance here on earth: "Christ was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times" (1 Pet 1:20). Only in this sense does the next text make sense where he informs us that the prophets of the Old Testament were inspired by the Spirit of Christ: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory" (1 Pet 1:10-11).

4.03 Doxology to Christ

It is in this same context of pre-existent christology, in other words, that of the divinity of Christ, that we can explain how the writers of the Catholic Epistles can devote a doxology to Christ. For in the Old Testament and in the Jewish tradition doxologies are addressed only to God. But the author of **2 Peter** ends his epistle with an exhortation to grow in the experiential knowledge of Christ which ends with a doxology not to God but to Jesus Christ: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (2 Pet 3:1; cf. also Rom 16:25; Eph 3:20). Very similar to this is the text in **1 Peter** where we are told that "to him (*ho*, that is to Christ) belong the glory and the power (*kratos*) forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:11c). All the same the subtle distinction between God and Jesus is carefully maintained, since it is stated that God should be glorified in all things *through Jesus Christ* (cf. v.11b. Italics ours).

Regarding the other text in this epistle where it looks as if the author calls Jesus Christ "our God" it must be stated that the meaning is not altogether unambiguous. The epistle is addressed "to those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1b). For it could also be understood disjunctively, for in the Greek original both "God" and "Savior Jesus Christ" are in the genitive, (Footnote) as is the case in the next verse: "May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God *and of Jesus our Lord*" (v.2. Italics ours).

4.04 Christ as Lord

It is a well-known fact that the Jews avoided pronouncing the name of YhWh and that they used the vowels of 'adonay on the consonantal text of YHWH. Thus whenever YHWH appeared in the biblical text they read it as 'adonay. As a result the Septuagint as a rule rendered YHWH as KYRIOS which the RSV translated as LORD (all capitals). And so when the New Testament writers used the title KYRIOS for Jesus it is tantamount to stressing the divinity of Christ. Thus we have a large amount of texts in the Catholic Epistles which call Jesus "Lord" (cf. 2 Pet 1:2. 1. 13; 2:20; 3:2 Jam 1:1; Pet 3:15).

Besides there are two texts (2 Pet 2:1 and Jude 4) which use the word "Master" (*despotes*) for Christ. It is a word that is much more rare than the usual "Lord" (*Kyrios*). As E.M. Sidebottom informs us: "The word used (that is, *despotes*) means the lord of a slave, and it is never used of Jesus (as apparently here and at Jude 4) elsewhere in the New Testament. It is used of God five times (Lk 2:29; Act 4:24; 2 Tim 2:21), and of slave-owners four times (Tim 6:1 f. twice; Tit 2:9; Pet 2:18)".³³ And even in our present context where we are told that the "false teachers deny the Master who bought them" (2 Pet 2:1) the Greek verb *agorazo* is used literally for buying any article. But as Arndt and Gingrich inform us, figuratively it is "based on the analogy of religious law which in reality bestowed freedom on a slave purchased by a divinity".³⁴ It is in this context that Paul applies it to Christians who were bought (*egorasthete*) for a price which is his blood (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). What our author is trying to tell us is that the false teachers are ungrateful to Jesus who had bought them their freedom. It is to be kept in mind that the word *despotes* does not have the negative connotations associated with the English equivalent "despot". Thus it is used in a prayer addressed by the early Christians to God (cf. Act 4:24).

Jude however speaks in a very similar context to that of 2 Peter. He says that the "intruders" or false teachers by their lives of licentiousness (*aselgeia*) deny our only Master (*despotes*) and Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

5.00 Antignostic Christology

One of the hotly debated issues in New Testament exegesis is the

33. Cf. *James, Jude and 2 Peter*, p. 112. (See footnote 4).

34. Cf. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* under *agomazo*. (See footnote 14)

problem of Gnosis or Gnosticism³⁵. In particular the question is: Who are the "gnostics" whom the New Testament authors are virulently attacking? Related to this is the larger issue whether there was a pre-Christian Gnosis or whether it is a heretical offshoot of Christianity. In general it might throw some light on the subject to know that German scholars reserve the term "Gnosis" for the pre-Christian antecedents of the doctrine and "Gnostizismus" (Gnosticism) for the post-Christian heresies as represented by all types of Docetists like Kerinthos, Valentinian as well as Marcion and others that followed. And so we must be on our guard not to naively imagine we have discovered later Gnostic speculations in earlier New Testament texts like the genuine Epistles of Paul.

5.01 Meaning of the Term *gnosis*

The Greek word *gnosis* as found in the New Testament writings should be explained against the Old Testament Hebrew usage of *da'at* or the Aramaic *manda*³⁶ rather than from Greek philology. It is however interesting to note that in the Hellenistic literature *gnosis* is also used for the mystical experience of the initiates of the Mystery Religions³⁷. At any rate as far as the New Testament literature is concerned *gnosis* or "knowledge" should never be interpreted as active, speculative or abstract but rather as "experience" which is more passive than active. Sometimes the Greek word *epignosis* is

35. For the whole question of Gnosis and Gnosticism see R.M. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem* 1958 as well as *Gnosis and the New Testament*, 1968.

Further H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd ed. 1963 and R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* 1959. See also E.H. Pagels, "Gnosticism" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Suppl., Vol., ed. by K. Crim, Abingdon press, Nashville 1976.

36. The Gnostics of the area of lower Mesopotamia are known as Mandaean, that is those who possess the true *manda* or "knowledge". There are about 15,000 of them living in Iraq. Their texts are written in Mandaic, an eastern Aramaic dialect. The *Book of John* describes John the Baptist as a Mandaean! According to Yamauchi "there is no objective evidence of the establishment of Mandaism earlier than the second century A.D.". Cf. "Mandaism" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Suppl. Vol., ed., by K. Crim, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1976.

37. Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, University of Chicago press, 1957.

also used but there is no difference in meaning between the two words. What we have said of the noun *gnosis* "knowledge" also applies to the verb *ginosko*, "to know" which is very frequent in 1 John.

5.02 Controversy with Gnosticism in the New Testament

Outside the Catholic Epistles the main authors who are crossing swords with Gnosticism are to be found in the genuine Pauline Epistles like Romans and Corinthians, the Gospel of John, the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Pastorals. In so far as the genuine Pauline Epistles represent the initial stages of the struggle against Gnosticism, John, Ephesians and the Pastorals may be said to preserve the later stages. And so the Catholic Epistles may be said to represent a somewhat intermediary stage.

Thus Paul asserts the superiority of the specific Christian virtue of love (*agape*) over knowledge (*gnosis*) in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 13:2). He also insists that salvation has come to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus and not through the communication of any secret knowledge from anyone as is clear from all his Epistles. It is another story when we come to the Epistle to the Ephesians which speaks of *Pleroma* (Ephes 3:19; cf. Col 2:9) and seems to be attacking a full-blown Gnostic theological system as is later represented by Basilides and Valentinian. Similarly John too insists that the Word of God became flesh thus positively asserting the goodness of matter against the Gnostics who despised matter and the flesh. Gnosticism seems to have been of two types, one *Libertinistic* which held that what one does in the flesh does not affect the spirit and so resorted to all sorts of licentiousness. It is mainly against this form that the New Testament writings from 1 Corinthians to 2 Peter are directing their polemics. The second form is the so-called *Encratistic* or ascetic form of Gnosticism with their insistence on continence and their taboos and prohibition of marriage, sex and material pleasures. Traces of this could possibly be found in the Pastorals (cf. 1 Tim 4:3).

5.03 Antignostic Christology in the Johannine Epistles

The First Epistle of John though it goes its own way does preserve some similarities with the genuine Pauline literature in so far as it insists on the fact first of all that salvation comes to us through faith in Christ and not through any esoteric communication of knowledge.

Secondly he tells us that no one who does not keep Christ's commandments can claim to have knowledge of God: "Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, 'I have come to know him', but does not obey his commandments is a liar....." (1 Jn 1:3). In other words orthopraxis is the proof of orthodoxy. Thirdly the commandment of the Lord is love of neighbour; "The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters" (1 Jn 4:21. See also the previous verse). The basis for all this is succinctly stated by the author when he says that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16b). And so he can draw the conclusion: "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Likewise no one who possesses the world's goods and refuses to help one in need, can claim that God's love abides in him or her (cf. 1 Jn 3:17). And so orthodox christology must lead us not to arm - chair speculation but to selfless action!

That matter is not evil is not stated explicitly but is implied in what the author of 1 John says. Thus for example he tells us that "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). Docetism of any sort is ruled out by him when he says: "Many deceivers (*planoi*) have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, any such person is the deceiver (*planos*) and the antichrist (*antichristos*)" (2 Jn 7). And again: "By this you know the spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God" but from the Antichrist (cf. Jn 4:2-3) Specific to Christian theology is that human beings meet God as Father in His Son Jesus through the Spirit. But the meeting-point is clear, history and not speculation, that is Jesus "who has come in the flesh" (2 Jn 7) and not the mythical Christ of the Gnostics.

5.04 Antignostic Christology in the other Catholic Epistles

Both **Jude** and **2 Peter** are directed against some false teachers who have secretly gained admission into the community (jude 4) and are misleading the faithful through their false doctrine (2 Pet 2). According to **Jude** they are "ungodly" persons "who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4), whereas according to **2 Peter** they are called "false teachers" who through their "licentious ways" malign the "way of truth" and "deny the Master who bought them" (cf. 2 Pet 2:1-3). It looks like the false teachers mentioned here are Gnostics of the

Libertinistic brand. For we are told that "they count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes reveling in their dissipation while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed" (2 Pet 2:13-14). **Jude** compares them to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah who "indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust" (Jude 7). They are called "dreamers who defile the flesh" (Jude 8) and again "grumblers and malcontents" who "indulge their own lusts" and are "bombastic in speech, flattering people to their own advantage" (Jude 6). Gnostics considered themselves as spiritual people who were untouched by the sins of the flesh. They considered Christians and pagans as "worldly people" (*psychikoi*). And now the author of Jude proves that indeed they themselves are what they call others (cf. Jude 19). He even goes further and calls them "irrational animals" who are guided by instinct (cf. Jude 10). As **2 Peter** tells us, they promise freedom to other people while they themselves are "slaves of corruption" (cf. 2 Pet 2:19). All "antinomianism" or contempt for the moral law which is exhibited by the Gnostics is to be rejected by Christians, who as James tells us should follow the "perfect law, the law of liberty", that is, the law which brings us liberty (cf. Jas 1:24). The insistence on good behaviour (*anastrophe*) in 1 and 2 Peter is directed against the Gnostics who imagine that salvation is obtained merely through the acquisition of this esoteric "knowledge" (cf. Pet: 15 -1; 2:12; 3:1; 2 Pet 2:7; 3:11).

There may be an allusion to the Gnostics in James too who says that "such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly (*epigeios*), unspiritual (*psychikos*), devilish (*daimoniodes*)" (cf. Jas 3:15), where we have merely to substitute "knowledge" (*gnosis*) for "wisdom" (*sophia*). The terms which have been translated as "earthly" and "unspiritual" correspond to the tripartite division of the microcosm and the macrocosm current among Gnostics where the human being is divided into three parts, body or flesh (*soma or sarx*), soul (*psyche*) and spirit (*pneuma*). Similarly human beings in the world are divided into three types according as they correspond to these three aspects. Thus according to the Gnostics the pagans are called *somatikoi*, or *sarkikoi*, that is "material" or "carnal", containing no element of transcendence or the divine, the Christians are *psychikoi*, that is containing some elements of the divine, whereas only the Gnostics can claim for themselves the title *pneumatikoi*, that is fully spiritual or divine.

6.00 Conclusion

After a careful study of the Christology of the Catholic Epistles one realizes that they have much in common with the rest of the New Testament writings. Thus there is no difference at all in their treatment of what we have called *traditional christology* as found in the genuinely Pauline literature and the Synoptic Gospels. The same thing could be said of the so-called *ascent christology* and the controversy with *Gnosticism*. When we come to the treatment of the theme of the *Parousia* we notice that 2 Peter for example has had the task of reinterpreting the return of the Lord. It is no longer imminent as Paul and the Synoptics Mark and Matthew have it. His treatment is closer to that of Luke but he has as we have seen given his own interpretation regarding the alleged delay of the parousia. The Johannine literature has much in common with the Gospel of John but there too 1 John goes his own way beyond what John had taught as for example when he applies the epithet *Paraclete* or *Advocate* for Christ rather than for the Holy Spirit. Similarly the idea of *Antichrist* is peculiar to the Epistles of John and is not available in John's Gospel. The theme of *Christ's Descent into the underworld* and his proclamation of the Good News to its inmates too is expressly treated only in 1 Peter even though vague allusions to his descent are to be found elsewhere in the New Testament. In this aspect the Catholic Epistles, 1 and 2 Peter and Jude, show close affinities to the apocryphal literature like that of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch and the Testament of Moses. And so it can safely be said by way of conclusion that to have a comprehensive treatment of Christology one cannot ignore the Catholic Epistles.

De Nobili College,
Pune.

Rui de Menezes,

THE SLAUGHTERED LAMB AND WHOSEVER CONQUERS

The book of Apocalypse is addressed to Christians facing very special situation of tension, confusion, instability, despair and hopelessness. The author is re-interpreting Jesus Christ and his salvific achievement for them. Thereby a new christological phase is initiated in method and content. Jesus is presented as the Lord of history like God seated upon the throne, as the slaughtered lamb, as a prophetic pastor who does not take believers out of the world, but remains with them and enables them to conquer the world and live in fidelity.

As a reader moves slowly through the Apocalypse various pictures of Jesus Christ emerge and different emotions stir within. We will quietly look at the pictures of the Lamb. Throughout the book we need more to look, see and imagine than think and reflect. The book creates impressions by means of vivid and at times strange symbols evoking within deep emotions.

Jesus Christ of the Apocalypse - First Glance

With a few words we have a panoramic view of the whole life of Jesus – the ministry of Jesus is summarized in the description of him as “the faithful witness to God” whose fidelity is acknowledged in his resurrection, “the first born from the dead”, and who remains within our history as sovereign, “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5).¹ From such a vast vision we move to the realm of personal concern and relationship. Jesus is the one “who loves us” and has shown this in such concrete ways: “He freed us from sin” at great personal cost, “by

1. We have used the NRSV text for all quotations and the Harper Collins Study Bible with the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books, General Editor Wayne a. Meeks, 1993. The notes are excellent. Two simple and useful commentaries are: M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville, John Knox Press, 1989 and G. R. Beasley -Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972.

his own blood" and recreated us making us the chosen people of God, "a kingdom of priests" with the simple and wonderful responsibility of "serving *his* God and Father" (1:5-6).

An awesome and frightening picture of the "one like a Son of Man" (1:13-16) who is Son of God (2:18) turns to be an experience of deep reassurance and comfort as Jesus Christ has not only personally conquered death and can now state "I am alive forever and ever", but also he has become the perpetual source of life with total mastery over Death ("I have the keys of Death and Hades") and is sovereign Lord as "the first and the last" (1:17-18) with the keys of David so that "he opens and no one will shut and he shuts and no one opens" (3:7). I have always been deeply moved by this great opening vision, elements of which are repeated in the beginning of each of the following letters. He continues to speak to us as we fall at his feet, "do not be afraid" (1:17).

We then are introduced to Jesus as a type of sovereign and humble pastor (Chs 2-3-letters to the seven churches). Jesus remains within human history and is present within the local churches. He knows the hearts of all (2:23). Jesus is sensitive, speaking words of praise and encouragement (2:2-3), aware of the believer's poverty and powerlessness (2:9-10.13; 3:8), of their sufferings, of their faithful endurance (2:13. 19; 3:10) and their waywardness and frailty (3:1-3. 15-17).

A moving picture is drawn which has fascinated writers and artists. Jesus stands at the door and knocks, waiting and calling, wishing to enter and share food (3:20). There is something deeply moving in this humble picture of one who is constantly presented in the letters as Lord and Sovereign. As a pastor Jesus responds, admonishes, urges a community to greater fidelity, cautions and warns. The harsh reproofs (cf 3:15-18) are tempered with the reassuring words: "I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore and repent" (3:19). He opens the hearts of the communities to hope with promises of reward, not using the "carrot and stick method" but rooting the promises in his own journey to God and glory won through fidelity to God (2: 26-28; 3:21).

From the pastor "who was dead and came to life" and is the "faithful and true witness" (2:8;3:14) we are awe struck and remain in silent wonder before the majesty of the lamb where we are then taken up into the reverberating acclamations of praise of the massive choirs (5:9-10. 12-17). We see the lamb slaughtered in all his majesty at the

very centre of God's court. Because of his fidelity in the face of his horrible death, he alone within the whole cosmos has the right to approach God and take the scroll of history and divine dominion and judgement with its seven seals (5:1-14). We echo with the whole of creation:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing." (5:12)

However, for many the picture which may remain haunting them is Jesus Christ associated so intimately with God in his terrifying wrath. Jesus Christ is also the ruthless judge (6:16-17; 14:9-11) cruel and proud warrior (19:11-21) dressed in a robe splattered with blood (19:13) armed with a sword and named "the Word of God" and "King of kings and Lord of lords". Earlier opening the seals he unleashes wave upon wave of destruction on the world, on the human race, and on Satan, the power of universal evil and "deceiver of the whole earth" (12:9), and on this evil incarnated within the structures of the Roman Empire, its Emperors, his officials and court and the places of cult and the priesthood and the city of Rome, which is described as Babylon, the Beast and great Whore (Chs 6.8.9. 15.16 and 17.19). He is the silent witness of men and women mercilessly tormented by God's savage wrath (14: 10-11). He judges the sinful world without a mention of mercy (14:14-20) and a gloating song in praise of God's mighty judgement is called the "song of the lamb" (15: 3-4). The way God is portrayed is more terrible. Such powerful imagery reminds us that moral evil in its destructive personal and structural forms is an abomination before God.

This terrifying picture of Jesus which runs through Chs 5-19 and before whom all "the tribes of the earth will wail" (1:7) is offset by the sovereign Lord, comforter and hope of the believers severely suffering yet faithful and even murdered (2:3.9-10.13; 6:9-10; 14:1-5; 17:6; 19:2). He is the shepherd of those "who have come out of the great tribulation.....they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). He will guide them to springs of living water (7:17). He possesses the book of life (3:5; 13:8; 21:27). The two pictures of the Lamb who was slaughtered surrounded by the 144,000 (ch 7. 14: 1-5) with the Father's and the Lamb's name written on their foreheads and who have been faithful to the Lamb (7:14) is in such striking contrast to the Lamb as warrior and judge.

The final pictures of the Lamb resonate with special joy as the

writer creates the culminating scenes of history and allows the persecuted communities to glimpse certain hope. First of all the Lamb is the bridegroom who celebrates a marriage feast with the saints, "his bride and wife of the Lamb" (19:7-8; 21:2.9). This vividly contrasts with the disgusting and grisly picture of "the great supper of God" where vultures gorge themselves on human flesh after the great final battle (19:17-18.21). With the Lord God almighty, the Lamb dwells among the saints as their Temple and Lamp and is the source of the water of life (21:22-23;22:1). The curse which had left its marks on all human history in so many ways from the outset (Gen 3:17; Rom 8:18-25) is totally banished and the Lord God and the Lamb dwell with great intimacy among the saints who will see the face of God (22:3-4).

We have sketched the story of the Lamb in Revelation. To understand the diverse and contrasting pictures we must examine what was happening in the lives of the communities for whom this prophetic book was written, see briefly the unfolding of the thought within the whole book and the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Lord God who is the Alpha and Omega, and the one "who is and who was and who is to come", the Almighty (1:8).

Life in the Cities of Asia Minor

To attempt to understand to some extent the lives of the men and women to whom John writes we need to consider the nature of the cities where they lived, the larger civil, religious and political world within which these cities existed and the tensions in the communities.

Most of the cities were important urban, political, religious and commercial centres or a mixture of these elements of life. Ephesus (2:1-7), one of the greatest cities of that whole period, was the seat of the Roman Pro consul and the largest city of the province of Asia with the famous temple of Artemis (Acts 19: 23-41); Smyrna (2:8-11) and Laodicea (3: 14-22) were important commercial centres, Smyrna being a port and Laodicea a very wealthy inland centre situated at the intersection of three imperial trade routes, a banking centre and famous for its linen and wool industries and its medical school; Pergamum (2:12-17), a very large city, was the capital and centre of the government of the Roman province of Asia, a city of civil servants and with Ephesus and Smyrna (seat of Bishop St. Polycarp AD 115) a famous centre of the imperial cult (worship of Rome and the Roman Emperors) and cult centres, Pergamum with its great temple of Asclepios, the god of healing, has been called the Lourdes of that era;

Sardis (3:1-6) had been a capital city for the Seleucid Kingdom, the Greek dynasty in Asia Minor, and with Philadelphia (3:7-13) was very badly damaged in an earthquake in AD 17 and was famous centre of woollen goods; Sardis, Philadelphia and Thyatira (2:18-29) were large towns rather than cities and were less important administrative centres, all relatively small yet important commercial centres. Thyatira the smallest, yet a town of business people and crafts persons with their guilds and so their regular meetings and religious celebrations. It was the home of Lydia (Acts 16:14).

An important part of life within these eastern cities and towns of the Roman empire was that all citizens and guild members shared in the cultic life of the locality and guilds. In the period after AD 81, at least during the reign of Domitian, the cult of the Emperors assumed more importance and became an obligatory duty of all citizens to ensure peace, unity and well being of the Empire and as a demonstration of loyalty. In the era of Domitian and after him there seems to have been more systematic persecution and martyrdom. The first real and short persecution took place in Nero's reign and there was a tradition about Nero's expected return which is referred to in the book (13:3).

The Jewish communities of the Empire had permission to only pray for the Emperor and were licit religious associations. The early Christian communities, predominantly gentile in membership, were gradually cut off from the Jewish communities. Their "secret" religious practices and meetings (a meal, eating body and blood of Jesus a criminal condemned by a Roman Procurator), their refusal to share in any form of normal cult and the cult of the Emperor who was proclaimed as Saviour of the World and Lord and divine, their refusal to buy and eat meat sacrificed in the many temples, their refusal to share in the sacred meals in the guilds...were actual or potential causes of at least civic tensions if not conflict with the State.

Though there was no official Roman persecutions in the early years- Nero's was an exception - yet the Christian religion was not licit and any citizen could denounce them and the civil authorities would have to take punitive measures which could be the death penalty. Our book does explicitly and emphatically include heroic believers who have been martyred (2:13- Antiphon at Pergamum; 6:9; 12:11; 13:15; 14:4-5; 18:24; 19:2) and refers to beheading which may indicate the higher social status of some of the martyrs (20:4). The main cause of the martyrdom is said to be the refusal to worship the "beast" (13:15). We need to recall the evidence of at least local civic persecutions in

1 Peter and Hebrews. There was always the danger of popular plunder, persecution and various forms of harassment by the arbitrariness of some officials. They could be discriminated against socially and economically (cf. 13:16-17. Heb 10: 32-34).

The Jewish communities in these cities and towns became more hostile in their attitudes to the christian groups and conflicts, disputes, excommunications and unsettling influence of Jewish teachers are witnessed to also in John's and Matthew's Gospels. A particular jewish community is in Smyrna called "a synagogue of Satan" (2:9).

Within the communities there were tensions caused by the influence and teaching of influential members. There were disputes about the degree the members could share in the civic and political life and how to preserve their identity in the hostile and confusing environment. The communities were mere minorities. The cult of the Emperor could be refused, accepted with mental reservations or fully accepted. There is evidence that each of these options was championed at various times. Though christians would not worship directly in the temples yet sacred meals and sacrificial food and "social" gatherings....created continual problems. There was the constant danger of cultic and moral accommodation to the cults and morality of the majority and possibilities of dangerous syncretism.

Life in the Seven Churches

When we read carefully the "letters" (somewhat similar to decrees or edicts of State officials or the Emperor) we discover a lot about the communities and their problems.

First of all most of the members came from the lower strata of society, the real working class and would have been poor and vulnerable with little protection before the local population and civil authority (2:9; 3:8; yet see 3:17).

Two problems are constantly mentioned. One was both popular and more official discrimination, harassment, repression and some persecution, imprisonment and even murder. Remember that the writer is in official exile as a punishment (1:9). A common theme is "endurance and fidelity".

The other problem arose from Jewish groups and their propaganda and denunciation before officials (2:9; Acts 18: 12-17; 3:9 and 2:9 – the synagogue of Satan) and from inside through the pernicious influence of heretical christian groups, probably both more educated and socially better placed than the majority. The writer refers to the

false apostles (2:2), the Nicolaitans (2:6.15 of whom we know very little); a teacher referred to as Balaam (2:14) and Jezebel and her followers (2:20-23). Both the Jezebel group and Balaam promote eating sacrificial food and sexual immorality (2:14.20). With severe sarcasm the teaching of the Jezebel group is described as "the deep things of Satan" (2:24).

These were the circumstances in which the communities lived and these circumstances determine both the apocalyptic literary form and language chosen for the prophetic writing and the way in which the Lord God and Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slaughtered, warrior, ruler, judge and Bridegroom, are presented.

Though we will not find communities in India living in similar circumstances, yet we will in various parts find Christian communities and groups really discriminated against. However, even if a particular group in some place is a mere minority, yet they can call on the support of larger Christian groups and the more universal Christian community. There was no CBCI, Vatican, Universal Church at that time and so the communities were really helpless in the face of popular and official evil. So it is difficult to read Revelation as a whole in dialogue with communities and their experiences today. God and Jesus Christ were the only hope these communities had in the face of the enormous power of the Empire and all its officials and popular hatred, suspicion and violence.² We shall now look at the major themes in the book.

Major Themes of the Apocalypse

We need to be aware of the major flow of thought. We shall sketch it. The book is framed by the sentence "what must soon take place" (1:1; 22:6 and 22: 10-15). Judgement is soon to take place with the coming of God and the Lamb. So the major theme is a panoramic description of divine judgement of all evil and those responsible for evil and the divine victory and recreation of the cosmos. Terrifying scenes of initial judgement are depicted using the symbols of the opening of

2. Some would read Revelation from a perspective of Dalit consciousness and experience. We would need to carefully explain such a reading. The Chinese communities in China, Christian churches in Eastern Europe before the Berlin wall came down, and forgotten communities under oppressive autocratic landowners and governments in parts of Latin America prior to Liberation Theology could have found courage in the Jesus of the Apocalypse.

the seven seals (Ch 5-6 and 8:1-5), the blowing of the seven trumpets (8:6-9:21, 10:15-19) and the pouring out of God's wrath from the seven cups (Chs 15-16). This is followed by scenes of final judgement of the whole world symbolized by the Emperors, Empire and Rome (The great Whore, Babylon, Chs 17-19) and of the ultimate cause of Evil, the Dragon/ Satan (Ch 20). In contrast are scenes of transformative recreation symbolized by the new heaven and earth and the new Jerusalem and the banquet of the Lamb. As introductory scenes to God's punitive actions are descriptions of the Divine court (Chs 4-5; 8:1-5; 7:9-17; 11:15-19; 15:2-8 and 19:1-10). The central conflict between God and the Dragon (Satan) and the Empire and its cult (Beasts) and the descriptions of judgement and salvation are summarized in Chs 12-14.

Throughout these savage, terrifying and bizarre scenes of initial and on - going judgement with no real temporal logic so that the present and final judgement become indistinguishable, small scenes appear of promise, encouragement, reward for fidelity and exhortations to patience and endurance (6:9-11; 7:1-17; 8:3-4; 11:1-13; 15:2-4; 19:1-8 and 13:10; 14:7, 12.13; 16:15; 18:9). These are addressed to the confused, dismayed, struggling and faithful yet anxious believers in the seven churches and to those saints who died.

Aspects of a Theology of History?

There are aspects of a theology of history inherent in the book. The major theme is the struggle between good and evil. However evil is so massive, permeating all society, its structures from smallest to the most powerful (Empire), groups and personal lives. Behind all expressions of evil is Satan, thrown down from heaven and causing tremendous and endless havoc on earth ("The great dragon was thrown down.....Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" 12:9). Therefore the struggle is between God Almighty and his court and the Lamb and Satan. God's attitude to evil within history is expressed in the calamities which mark human history and which ought to be read in faith as symbols of judgement and calls to repentance. This is not done. There is another struggle fought by the believing community not with might and destructive power but with endurance and fidelity in the face of various types of expression of evil (harassment, propaganda, injustice...). The final victory of God over evil enables the communities of believers to see the meaning of their own struggle in life to remain true to God.

Within the major struggle between good and evil Jesus Christ has

a major role. He is the Lamb slaughtered who forever stands before God. The text says in 5:6 "the Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered". The writer wants to stress the victory of Christ and the circumstances of that victory, his life and death. His death is behind him. The Lamb is called "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" who has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals". A further description is that the Lamb "has seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the whole earth" (5:5.6). Without going into a detailed explanation of the texts, the writer wants to explain that the Lamb both conquered evil in his own life and has been gifted with divine power and authority. He plays a key role within history in the conflict with Evil and in the culminating moments of history.

The struggle with Evil continues throughout history, victory is beyond human power and capabilities and complete victory is exclusively a divine reality. There are signs within history of this cosmic conflict yet Evil remains a major power within history. However there will be an ultimate and complete victory and God will destroy all Evil and create God's Kingdom. All who believe are entrusted with the responsibility to enter this conflict with evil on the "local" level trusting in God and assured that ultimate victory will be won. The personal and group human struggle though never final yet is meaningful.

The one who sits on the Throne and the Lamb

We return to the ways Jesus Christ is presented in this strange sacred book. Throughout the New Testament all the accounts and descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ, Son of God and Lord, are placed within the great story of God's plan and action before, within and at the end and beyond history. This is often forgotten in both popular spirituality and theology and also in more disciplined studies of Jesus Christ. We cannot reflect on or understand the Jesus Christ of the Apocalypse without relating him to the story of God's actions and plans as told in the OT and in this book. We need to also remember that there are over four hundred allusions to the OT in the Apocalypse.

We could describe the relationship between Jesus Christ and God in terms of "like Father, so Son" and the order is never reversed. God is constantly described in terms of "the one who is seated on the throne" and Jesus Christ is either the Lamb or Christ who is associated with the throne. This association with the throne is won by Jesus

through his fidelity. It ultimately led him to his death (1:5; 3:14. 21; 5:9; 19:11) where he received his favoured name in this writing, "the Lamb who was slaughtered" and simply the Lamb (5:6. 9.12.13....). The word "slaughtered" brings out the meaning of the greek verb and indicates the horror of Jesus' suffering and death. This creates a special bridge and bond between Jesus and the suffering community, and a shared identity with them and a promised hope for them. The hope is rooted in the fact that the Lamb slaughtered now and forever stands before God.

Jesus Christ calls God "my God and my Father" (cf 2:3. 28; 3:2.5.12.21; 14:1): he remains ever distinguished from God yet inseparable from all God does. The throne belongs to God yet Jesus is so closely associated with God that in one hymn he is referred to as "the Lamb at the centre of the throne" (7:17) and in a word of promise to the believers Jesus says that "I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21).

The relationship between the one who sat on the throne and the Lamb is revealing. At the climax of the great throne scene when we are introduced to the Lamb every creature acclaims:

"To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever" (5:13).

In a horrifying moment of judgement both the powerful and the lowly, rich and the poor hide themselves and cry out in terror to the mountains and rocks:

"Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?" (6:16-17). In contrast, the great multitudes in white robes standing before the throne and before the Lamb joyfully cry out:

"Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb" (7:10).

Both God and the Lamb show great concern:

"The one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more and thirst no more.....

for the Lamb at the centre of the throne

will be their shepherd and will guide them to

the springs of the water of life

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:15-17).

The culmination of history and judgement is described as "the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of Our Lord and his

Messiah and he will reign forever" (11:15; 12:10). The 144,000 gathered around the Lamb have "his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads(14:1). In contrast those who bear the Beast's name " will drink of the wine of God's wrath poured out and unmixed (undiluted) into the cup of his anger.....in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (14:10). This is a frightening scene.

In many different ways the Lamb is associated with God's punitive judgements on the world, his initial, ongoing judgement which produces no repentance (9:21) and the final judgement of Rome and her Emperors and Empire (Babylon, Beasts, the great Whore Chs 17-19) and all evil people (14:9-11; 17:20; 20:11-15). However he is not mentioned in the scene of the judgement of the root of all Evil, the Dragon/Satan (Ch 20). We have seen how the Lamb is associated with seals, trumpets and cups of wrath. One vivid and horrible scene is described. Jesus is at war with all evil forces (17:13-14; 19:19). He is pictured as the great avenger and warrior, the rider of the white horse and named Faithful and True, the King of kings, Lord of lords and Word of God with a sword coming from his mouth (19:11-21). He is at the centre of God's merciless judgement since "he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (19:15) and be responsible for mass killing since "the rest were killed by the sword of the rider of the horse" (19:21).

Finally in the transformed world and within the community of all the children of God (21:7), the one who was seated on the throne and the Lamb are very closely associated. God alone seems to be responsible for the radical transformation of the world ("See I am making all things new"..."It is done! I am Alpha and Omega" [21:5-6]), namely for the creation of the new heaven and earth and the new Jerusalem and preparing the bride for the Lamb, the new people of God (21:1-4. 9-10). However in the city the **temple** is "the Lord God almighty and the Lamb" (21:22), the source of light is the glory of God who is its light and its lamp is the Lamb (21:23). The water of life will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1) and in the city we find the "throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:3).

Jesus Christ, a title rarely used in the book, shares with God a universal sovereign power as the "alpha and omega" (God 1:8; 21:6 and Jesus 22:13), as the "beginning and end" (21:6 and 22:13) and as "the one who is to come" as judge (God: 1:4.8; 4:8; 11:7; 16:5 and Jesus: 22:12.20 cf 2:5.16; 3:11; 22:7). God alone has the prerogative

to be called "the one who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4.8; 4:8;11:17;16:5), the all holy (4:8) who as universal creator (*Pantocrator* 4:11; 10:6; 14:7) shared this action in some way with Christ, "the Amen (namely master workman Prov 8:30) and origin of God's creation" (3:14). He shares God's majesty and sovereign power as is shown in the hymnic acclamation which are similar for God and the Lamb (4:11; 5:12. 13; 7:15-17).

Though judgement in its initial and ongoing forms and as final and universal is more forcefully and repeatedly described as God's initiative and prerogative yet the Lamb shares in judgement. The various descriptions of God's wrath and its destructive, unrelenting and fierce character and the cosmic dimensions, particular to apocalyptic literature, are really horrifying and are celebrated in a number of hymns which re-enforces the apparently ugly picture of God (11:17-18; 5:3-4; 16:15-17; 18:19-20; 19:1-3). The drawn out lament over the destruction of Babylon remains to haunt readers (Ch 18).

The biblical horror of evil in its personal and structured forms, the extremely distressing and helpless situation of the communities and the apocalyptic literary form explain the prolonged and gruesome descriptions of judgement.

Contrasted with the awesome descriptions of wrath are the descriptions of God and the Lamb caring for "their servants, the prophets and saints". God and the Lamb are in the very midst of them God is their God and they are the new people and his family which he creates for himself (21:3.7; 1:6). They are saved from the second death (2:11). God gently wipes away every tear, destroying Death and Hades, removing mourning and pain, quenching thirst and satisfying hunger. God prepares a great marriage banquet for the beautifully dressed bride and wife of the Lamb and creates a sacred city free of all evil, terror and aggression (7:15-17; 11:15. 17-18; 19:6-8; 21:3-4. 6-7.9; 22:1-5. 14.17.19).

All will possess eternal life (2:17; 3:5.12) and have unhindered access to the tree of life (2:7; 22:2.14.19) and are given a new name (2:12; 19:12). The Lamb shares with them his sovereign authority (2:26-28), confesses their name before his Father (3:5) and makes them share his own throne (3:21).

The Lamb as Pastor to Distressed Communities

We return now to the understanding of Jesus Christ. I propose as a major and unifying description that we see Jesus as the prophetic

Pastor of believing communities who are absolutely insignificant minorities in a religiously and socially alien environment. The local population and local and provincial government are strongly antagonistic and capable of undermining the faith and ethical life of some of the believers and creating situations of great hardship and even the danger of death for any one who wants to remain faithful to his faith. The way Jesus Christ is portrayed is to strengthen, encourage and give hope to these men and women caught in webs of helplessness and powerlessness.³

The whole book is conceived of as Jesus' personal pastoral address to these communities through a recognised community leader. The book begins with the words "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place.....by sending his angel to his servant John.....(1:1).

It concludes with "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the Churches" (22:16) and " The one who testifies to these things says 'Surely I am coming soon'" (22:20). While the Gospels are about Jesus, and the letters are parts of the pastoral ministry of significant founders and leaders of Churches like Paul and Peter, this book is conceived as Jesus' own personal address.

This aspect is underlined in the brief "letters" to each of the Churches through which Jesus personally addresses each community as their Pastor. He is presented at the opening of each letter as a figure of authority in whom the community can hope. His message is summarized in an idea which recurs in his exhortations: "whoever conquers" or " to the one who conquers" (2:7. 11.17.26; 3:5.12.21; 21:7. cf 12:11 and 15:2). The final reference to personal victory is: Those who conquer will inherit these things and I will be their God and they will be my children" (21:7). Greater and greater fidelity and endurance at whatever cost, even death are the ideals placed before the communities. Discipleship begins with forgiveness of sins (wash-

3. This would be the starting point for contextual readings. Today the power of the Christian community with so many institutions, its concern to be socially acceptable, the lack often of prophetic witness in its way of life and at times its leadership protect it from real suffering and persecution. However there are groups, families and individuals who have to live with prolonged experiences of helplessness and powerlessness because of their faith life and witness. With the Jesus of this book they can have dialogue.

ing one's robes in the blood of the Lamb 7:14; 22:14) and means "to follow the Lamb wherever he goes (14:4) and the ideal is to "conquer the accuser (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" and this meant "they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (12:11). The reward for fidelity is spelt out with many images which describe eternal life.

Jesus is not a Pastor unacquainted with suffering and death. He has become the Pastor because he himself has journeyed along the same road of fidelity towards the same goal. This is the significance of his special title "the Lamb which was slaughtered" and his other unusual titles like the Amen, Faithful and True and Faithful witness. Therefore he has become the ruler of the kings of the earth", received authority from God and is at the centre of the throne. (cf Chs 1-3 and the titles of responsibility Jesus has been given). He is also not powerless but the judge of all who gives the gift of life to the righteous and inflicts the second death on all who are evil (22:12-13 with 20:11-15 and 21:8).

Not only did his personal journey take him through death to life (2:8) and sovereign power and responsibility (5:12) but in great love he also ransomed by his blood for God saints from all walks of life, races, languages and cultures (1:6; 5:9). He became the shepherd who guides them to the springs of the water of life (7:17). He is the source of forgiveness, enabling believers to wash their clothes in his blood (7:14; 22:14) and created a new people of God (1:6; 5:10).

In challenging the communities to ever greater fidelity in the face of popular, civil and State pressure and organized persecution, Jesus not only gives an example and inspiration. He is able to reassure and give that hope which is based on his sovereign role. He stands forever before God.

In each letter his majestic sovereignty over the communities and far beyond is emphasized along with his own personal journey. Prior to the letters the communities, in the person of John, experience the overwhelming vision of "one like the Son of Man" and they feel his right hand touch each believer as he says to him or her "do not be afraid". Why no fear? Jesus is the lord of Death and Hades, himself having died yet now lives as sovereign, the First and the Last. They are to experience their Pastor as the Lord of the Churches, Son of God "with eyes like a flame of fire" who possesses limitless power, having the keys of David who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens".....(3:7)....They are also to experience their Pastor as the

judge and lord over all evil persons, be they Emperors, their officials, the priests and the Satan himself. The majestic pictures and pregnant symbols used are not meant to frighten the communities, but to underline Jesus' authority, his presence and knowledge ("he searches minds and hearts" 3:23) and above all are meant to give birth to and nourish reassurance, fidelity and hope in the communities. The victory belongs to them not to their persecutors and enemies. They are to struggle and in their fidelity and because of it they will experience the recreative judgement of God.

Jesus knows his communities so well, speaks personally to them words of affirmation and appreciation ("I know your affliction and poverty....."; "I know the slander....."; "You did not deny faith in me....."; "I know your works, your love, faith and service...."; "I know you have little power....."), he challenges them to draw out all the potentials of their faith, warns and cautions them and even sarcastically taunts them, "you say" I am rich, I have prospered and need nothing..., "you are wretched, pitiable poor, blind and naked....." 3:17).

Above all he is able to assure and promise them, giving them certain basis for hope amidst the agonizing struggles in their journey of faith. Evil does not and will not triumph.

There is a strange interplay between the acknowledgement of extreme pain and hope. There is an acute awareness of the painful situations, the murder of believers ("in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives" [Pergamum]), the enormous and corrupting power of the State (Chs 17-18), the moral decadence of the neighbourhoods (22:11a.15; 19:4-5,cf Ch 18) and the continued pressure to share in the cult of gods and the Imperial cult (14:9-11; 17:6; 19:20; 20:4). Referring to this influence of the State, John writes: "It (the Beast) causes those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. It causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on their right hand or the forehead so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name" (13:15-17; cf 14:9-11; 17:6; 19:20; 20:4). In such circumstances Jesus Christ both as the Lamb slaughtered and Ruler of rulers is able to invite believers to the uttermost fidelity and offer indisputable reassurance of hope. He is their prophetic Pastor.

The rewards he offers he has both the right and power to offer: "See I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay everyone according to everyone's work. I am Alpha and Omega, the First and

the Last, the Beginning and the End" (22: 12-13). The reward is the marriage feast of the Lamb and unhindered access to the tree of life and to enter the city by the *gates* (22:14).

In the circumstances the people cannot hope to oppose oppression by sociopolitical or economic or physical power. Jesus builds a sure foundation for hope and so a reason for fidelity and endurance. He gives profound meaning to life lived within helplessness and hopelessness and to be able to live with meaning and hope. The faithful communities and believers are already the Bride, have access to the tree of life, enter the city with pride by the gates, bear the name of the Lamb and God. God and the Lamb have already begun to live intimately among and with them. Jesus Christ himself is the basis and the Hope itself, "the bright morning star (22:10).

The community is to be strengthened and filled with realistic hope. There is a dialogue between Jesus Christ and his communities at the end. Addressing Jesus Christ, the Spirit and Bride say "Come". Everyone who hears says: "Come". Jesus as it were answers: "Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes to take the water of life as a gift" (22:17). The final words of the Lamb who was slaughtered are words of ultimate reassurance: "Surely I am coming soon".

The communities within painful and distressing contexts respond: "Amen, come Lord Jesus". They experience Jesus as present and long for his coming.

The communities live with the assurance that the Lamb at the centre of the throne will always be their shepherd and he will guide them to the spring of the water of life. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. "Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they will have the right to the tree of life and enter the city of God".

Jesus as the Lamb slaughtered does not take believers out of the world or promise them peace, prosperity, success.....He remains with them as a prophetic Pastor and enables them to conquer and to live in fidelity, in a rich and meaningful way and in hope.

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THE PIONEER OF SALVATION AND THE MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

The letter to the Hebrews is strange and new in its content and presentation. But close reading of the letter with emphasis on Jesus, the pioneer of salvation, a special figure of speech and Jesus the High Priest, a creatively new theme in the New Testament of presenting Christology, gives us a model of how reinterpretation demands risky exploration and articulations for making the faith relevant and earthy.

Introduction

An experience of strangeness and newness is the result of a close reading of the letter to the Hebrews. The strangeness is caused by the special language and illustrative material contained in this letter connected with the Jewish ceremonies, sacrifices, priestly observances, religious traditions and customs which are not familiar to the language, thought patterns and world vision of the reader.¹ Then in the course of reading one realizes that although catalogued a "letter", it is not in the form of a letter². Besides, one comes to understand that "Hebrews" to whom the letter is addressed cannot be Hebrews but Christians.³

Then, the knowledge of the content of the letter brings an experience of newness because one immediately takes note of the untraditional categories used by the author to present Jesus Christ bringing the reader to a quest for exploring the *Sitz im Leben* which demanded such a radical rethinking and rearticulation of the traditional faith.⁴ The letter deals with a theme which practically no other new

1. R. Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, (BST), Leicester, 1991, pp. 20-21.
2. A. Vanhoye, *Our Priest is Christ*, Rome, 1977 P. 5f, La structure de L' epitre aux Hebreux, Paris, 1963. But on the basis of ch. 13, this book is considered a letter. cfr. B. Lindars, *The Theology of the letter to the Hebrews*. Cambridge University Press, 1994 pp. 6-7. Against G.W, Buchman, *To the Hebrews*, Gorden city, 1972, pp. 26f.
3. R. Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, (BST), Leicester, 1991, pp. 16-17.
4. A. Vanhoye, *Our Priest is Christ*, Rome 1977, pp. 6-8.

Testament writing has developed, namely, the priesthood of Christ, according to the order of Melchizedek. Theologically the thematique adds a fresh dimension to the development of Christology.⁵ This is a creative phase in the early history of Christianity.⁶

In this article we are making a fresh attempt to take stock of this particular developmental phase in the christological reflection evidenced in the letter to the Hebrews. In the context of a reproposal of the urgency to reinterpret and rearticulate the person and mission of Jesus for the 3rd millennium in view of an authentic "deterritorialization", the challenge is not to yield to anachronic and katachronic interpretations but to synchronic and diachronic interpretations. Naturally, a model of action for such a praxis is found in the letter to the Hebrews.

Challenged by critique and new situation

Christological reinterpretation represented by the letter to the Hebrews is the result of a challenging situation of the Christian community. It cannot be evaluated outside this particular context of life. There are internal evidences for identifying this challenging situation of the community.

That the author takes care to include exhaustive sections after each doctrinal part is stylistically a disturbance in the development of the theme because they sometimes lead to far-fetched deviations from the thematic stream; they are however practically a great help to the reader. Since these parenetic sections are based on the concrete situation of the community, a perusal through such main sections would give us hints regarding the *Sitz im Leben* that demanded the reinterpretation of the central tenets of the faith.

One of the constant instructions is "to pay attention and listen" (2:1; 4:1-13) because there is the danger to drift away from the faith that came through hearing. What God has spoken to us in the Gospel of Christ is the point of reference. The Greek word used here for "to drift away" is *pararoumen* which denotes the "drifting" of a boat missing the landing point or slipping off of a ring from the finger or leaking of water from a faulty jar.⁷ This means that the community was experiencing such a danger of drifting or losing something very precious slipped through its fingers.

5. B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, P 1.

6. Ibid. p. 2.

7. R. Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, Leicester, 1991, 47.

So they are exhorted to remain faithful and obedient perseveringly: "Let us therefore with confidence draw near to the throne of grace...." (4:16); "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering...." (10:23); "Therefore do not throw away your confidence.... For you have need of endurance...." (10:35-36).... "....We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed...." (10:39). All these are synthesized in one sentence: "see that you do not refuse him who is speaking" (12:25).

What has caused this wavering, drifting, shrinking back attitude in the community of believers? "But recall the former days when after you were enlightened you endured a hard struggle with sufferings...."(10:32). It is addressed to a community that has suffered in the past on account of their steadfastness to the Gospel. The concrete sufferings are mentioned too (10:33-34). The community is still suffering. And they find no meaning for suffering. Hence the wavering in faith expressed in different attitudes like "neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some" (10:25). In the context of their experience of meaninglessness, they have consciously developed attitudes of habitual disinterestedness in the meetings, probably, referring to the eucharistic gatherings. The suggestion is that some "regarded themselves as a kind of spiritual elite and refused to associate with others" cannot be proved.⁸ It could be that there were many elements like hostility of family or neighbors, the threat of persecution pressurizing them. They were probably reluctant to face the risks of irrevocable commitment to the christian way.⁹ Two other manifestations of the wavered spirit may be inferred from the words: "Let brotherly love continue" (13:1) and "obey your leaders and submit to them" (13:17). These exhortations seem to presuppose the existence of a dissident group resisting to obey the leaders. The author is quite aware of the difficult and delicate issue he is dealing with as he writes: "pray for us for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things". (13:18).¹⁰ The reference to "diverse and strange teachings" and the statement that "the heart is

8. R. McL. Wilson, *Hebrews*, Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 193.

9. F.F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (NICNT), Grand Rapids, 1990, p.9

10. B. Lindars. *The Theology of the letter to the Hebrews*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 7. See also, R. Brown. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, N.Y / London, 1979; Lindars' attempt to reconstruct the situation of the reader only on the basis of ch. 13 is too narrow.

strengthened by grace and not by food...." in 13:9 read together with the discussion on the superiority of Jesus to Angels in 1:4f helps us infer the nature of the strange teaching. Having lost hope in the efficacy of the traditional presentation of the christological event, the drifting believers were having recourse to other strange teachings and practices like worship of angels etc.¹¹

Towards a Relevant Re-interpretation of the faith

To a community that finds no motivating power in the traditional articulation of faith, the author is challenged to opt for a risky venture of reinterpretation. That Jesus the Christ and Son of God can be the medium and means for a new authentic relationship with God has to be shown through new linguistic and thematic articulations. "It is not a repetition of the teaching previously given....It is on the contrary a creatively new development of the original teaching, the striking and original presentation of the Kerygma that Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures".¹²

Two major ideas that can represent this new christological articulation are: Jesus, the pioneer of salvation and Jesus the High Priest. Before reading the relevant texts and interpreting them, it is proper to read the introductory section that prepares the ground.

A Synthesis of Christology

The letter to the Hebrews right at the beginning gives a synthesis of the faith articulation in the context of salvation History. The self-revelation of God is crystallized in the word "speak" ...Up to the incarnation of the word, God has been speaking in various ways at various times. But in the last days, (*be aharit hayyamim*), God has spoken everything he has to reveal in the one Word, that is his own Son. The very being of God has been fully revealed to men in the Son. He is the creator and heir of all things. He is the very reflection of God's glory (*apaugasma tes doxes*) and the very stamp of His nature (*Charakter tes hypostaseos autou*). The redeeming value of his death is expressed as "making purification for our sins". The resurrection and ascension are referred to as "sitting down at the right hand on

11. Compare. Col. 2:18. Read also Gal 4:10.

12. B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, Pp. 60.

high". Here we have all the essential elements of faith in Jesus: How Jesus' coming is prepared by the preceding revelation, and how Jesus himself is the unique fullness of that revelation in whom the Father has manifested himself.

It is a lofty teaching about the person and mission of Christ. Jesus is not reduced here to an inspired man with a unique sense of religious destiny or an outstanding example of altruistic life etc. Here we have the harmonious presentation of Jesus' essential humanity and matchless divinity of the enthroned God. Jesus is God's prophetic voice, the son, the appointed heir, creative agent, personified glory, perfect revelation, cosmic sustainer and unique sacrifice.¹³ The suggestive and arresting titles that will be employed by the author are somehow prepared already anticipated in these sentences: Son (1:2.5.6; 2:6; 5:8; 7:28). the first born (1:6), God (1:8); the Lord (2:3); the pioneer of our salvation (2:10), a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17), high priest (4:14; 5:5; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11); apostle and high priest (3:1), the Son of God (4:14; 6:6; 10:29). guarantee of better covenant (7:22); mediator (8:6; 9:15; 12:24); pioneer and perfecter of our faith (12:2). the great shepherd of the sheep (13:20).

Jesus the "Pioneer"

The word *Archegos* usually translated as "Pioneer" is used as the title for Jesus in our letter in 2:10 and 12:2. Then the word occurs in Acts 3:15 and 5:31. In the former the expression is *ton de archegon tes zoes apekternate* (the pioneer of life you killed) and in the latter *Touton ho theos archegon kai sotera hypsosen te dexia autou* (Him God exalted at his right hand as pioneer and saviour). Both are descriptions of Jesus, in terms of honour. Directly or indirectly the implication of salvation is linked to the word through the expression *tes Zoes* and the parallel title *sotera*. The exalted status of Jesus after the resurrection is clearly implied: "whom God raised from the dead"; "Him God exalted at his right hand".

Both these occurrences are part of the speech of Peter and the other apostles before the Jews or Council. Peter is articulating through this suggestive figure of speech the uniqueness of the person and mission of Jesus. It is so unparalleled and crucial that one has to recognize the origin and source of life or salvation in Him which is equal to the very status of God. But simultaneously God's sovereignty

13. R. Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, Leicester, 1991, p. 28f.

is not neglected as it is clearly said either God raised Jesus or God exalts Jesus. In this context this word is a novel and impressive epitomization of the unique salvific function of Jesus.

Keeping this in mind, let us turn to the usage of this figure of speech - pioneer - in the letter to Hebrews.¹⁴ That the word *archegos* is translated diversely shows the complexity of its content and connotation. All its implications cannot be contained in a single word. It is translated as Author, pioneer, founder, originator, instigator, captain, leader, inaugurator, initiator, forerunner, path finder etc.

In 2:10 the word is used with the expression *tes soterias* and in 12:2 with *tes pisteos*. In the second text, parallel to *archegos* is used *teleiosten* (perfector). Whereas in the context of the first usage we have the verb *Teleioo*. Besides, the theme of suffering is part of the context, just like the theme of glory.

2:10 belongs to a section 1:5-2:18 in which the author is proving the superiority of Jesus to the angels. But this superiority does not make Jesus inaccessible to and distant from the humanity. To prove this the theme of suffering is introduced as the basis of Jesus' perfect identification with humanity that makes him call men "his own brothers" (2:11-12). In this context a synthesis of the essentials of the faith in Jesus, the one exalted and superior to angels, yet one with the humanity - Jesus, God and man - is presented in 2:10. In this summary, incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection are crystallized in the title or figure of speech "pioneer of salvation". Naturally, it is a christological synthesis.

12:2 is part of the exhortative section 11:1-12:12. After having described very vividly the faith of the witnesses of the Old Testament, the author proposes a concrete impulse for praxis...leaving it on a summary of christian faith. The believers are to run the race with perseverance looking at "the pioneer and perfector of faith, Jesus". The figure of speech makes a beautiful epitomization of the christological revelation: Jesus suffered, died and was risen and thus became the one who made it possible for the believers experience salvation; to run the race to the target. "Jesus is the climax of the

14. F.F.Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (NICNT) Grand Rapids. 1990, Pp. 80-81, D.Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Erdmans, 1983, Pp. 88-89; E.K. Simpson, "The Vocabulary of Epistle to the Hebrews" in *EQ* 18 (1946) 35f.; P.G. Muller, "Christos -Archegos" Bern Frankfurt, 1973. G. Johnston, "Christ as Archegos" in *NTS* 27 (1980-81) 381-385.

examples of faith because it is he who alone inaugurated the fulfillment of God's eschatological plan of salvation and also carried it through in his own person.¹⁵ The context and content of the usages of *archegos* in the letter to the Hebrews correspond to those in the Acts of the Apostles. The description is a medium of reinterpretation and rearticulation of the salvific significance of Jesus and his work in its unique and irrepeatable character. For a community that is wavering in faith and is facing the strong temptation to drift, this rearticulated faith in Jesus gives new hope. Traditional christological formulation, the Kerygma is experienced in a new formula that relevantly suits the concrete *Sitz im Leben* of the community. Jesus is experienced as the one who opened up the new path and walked in it, before the believer; the real path finder, inaugurator, founder, pioneer, is Jesus the one who came from the bosom of the Father, the only Son (incarnation), who returned to the Father through the passion and death and resurrection, Jesus the Saviour (Jn. 1:18; 13: 1-3). Jesus is the pioneer because he is human and has trodden the path everyone has to tread and remaining faithful even to the point of offering himself to God in death. He is the perfector of faith being the mediator of salvation, which process is complete through his death and resurrection.¹⁶

Jesus, the High Priest, Merciful and Faithful

It is really daring from the part of the author to present Jesus as the high priest in the order of Melchizedek adding a fresh dimension to the articulation of Christian faith. There was not anything external in the life of Jesus, like the birth in a priestly tribe that could have made the task easy for the author. His aim is to underscore the essential dimensions of the priesthood from the interior and qualitative point of view and thus prove the superiority, efficacy and greatness of the priesthood of Jesus, the Messiah.

He is superior to angels (1: 5-2:18). He is superior to Moses (3:1-6). He fulfills all conditions of being a priest according to the old definition: to be chosen, from the people, to offer sacrifice (5:1-10). Jesus was called and constituted high priest by the Father. Jesus was

15. B. Lindars. *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*. Cambridge University Press, 1994, Pp. 112f

16. Ibid., Pp. 136-137.

D. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Erdmans, 1983, P.88-89.

totally one with the humanity especially through suffering. Jesus offered himself in sacrifice, in total submission and obedience to God's will.

Jesus is the eternal priest because he is not of the order of Aaron who died and whose successors also died, but of the order of Melchizedek, who is without beginning and end, eternal (7:1f). In Abraham all the priests of the O.T. paid tithe to Melchizedek making him Superior to all of them.

Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant prophesied by Jer 31:31f. This new covenant was ratified through the perfect self-sacrifice of Jesus thus purifying the very conscience of men enabling them to be in communion with God (Chr. 8-10).

The preliminary explanation of the priesthood of Christ is found in 5:1-10. A priest is commissioned to deal gently with the sinners, being conscious of his ministry on behalf of all people. It is a divinely called status. Jesus learnt the meaning of human obedience, sharing our sufferings and thus became the means of salvation to all.¹⁷

Before developing the specific qualities of the priesthood of Jesus, the author reminds the readers that they are supposed to move to a mature understanding of the Kerygma (5:11-13). It is a more advanced teaching, that is intended for those who want to grow in maturity (*teleiotes*) i.e, to perfection or complete understanding.

Two interior essential qualities of a priest are: fidelity and mercy. One is vertical and the other horizontal, corresponding to the two essential aspects of christological Kerygma, the divine and the human. Jesus is proclaimed as both God and man in the perfect sense when the two dimensions like descending and ascending ones, are harmoniously combined in the fidelity of Jesus to God and His mercy to human beings. The perfect identification with the humanity through suffering, the expression of mercy, is not a weakness or defect but a sign of authentic holiness. Neither does this in any way diminish the transcendental aspect of 'Jesus' being but only enhance it. His fidelity to God, on the other hand, does not in any way make his identification with the human imperfect or defective but deeper and more involved. In 5:7-10 we have a beautiful summary: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death and he was heard for his godly

17. B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, Pp. 60-61.

fear. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek".

Hence in the death and resurrection both the essential dimensions are well-blended to become perfectly efficacious. Through death Jesus offers himself for the complete fulfillment of the plan of God for salvation and thus opens up the door of communion with God, becoming the "pioneer" of salvation: "He entered once for all into the Holy place taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:12). "For Christ has entered not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24).

Hence the author can now exhort the community to be confident and hopeful: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way, which is opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (10:19-22). The experience of Jesus as the high priest urges the believers to a deeper living of faith, hope and love (chs. 11-13). The community experiences a revitalization and stimulus for deeper dedication to Jesus through a reinterpretation of the Kerygma and its rearticulation in a meaningful and relevant language and thought.

Conclusion

Our reading Hebrews from the christological point of view has revealed fresh dimensions that the author succeeded in bringing out to the traditional faith. This was urged by the particular situation of the community that had stopped finding any real impetus and stimulus from the traditional presentation of faith for a meaningful response to the diverse crises they faced. The author's attempt to reinterpret the faith in Jesus in the context of the community found echoes of enthusiasm for a renewed faith life. Jesus who is the son of God and who died, rose again and is seated at the right hand of God was presented, above all, as the pioneer of salvation and then as High Priest, merciful and faithful.

The letter also becomes a paradigmatic stimulus for us in modern

times to take the risk of engaging in actual, relevant and mature, synchronic and diachronic reinterpretation of the person and mission of Jesus so that the passivity, disinterestedness and inertia experienced in the faith realm that usually give way to shrinking and drifting may lead rather to a revitalized faith situation. In this sense the letter to the Hebrews and its christological freshness becomes a medium for a revolutionary intercultural dialogue between faith culture and modern believer's culture.

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THE JESUS MOVEMENT AND THE ASIAN RENAISSANCE

Some Random Reflections for the Asian Synod

Introduction

The Doctrinal Commission of the CBCI has kindly asked us to publish some reflections and articles (if possible in the March issue of *Jeevadhara*) in spirit of the forthcoming Asian Synod. Accordingly we requested one of our eminent theologians to write an article on the 'New Vision of the Church'. As it is not available in time, these random reflections come forth as a prologue. On reading the *Lineamenta*, we were left wondering why western norms with their Christology and Ecclesiology, the most crucial in the context, are set for an Asian Synod.

Asia is a vast and diverse continent, 'three (continents) in one', as some say, with 60 % of the world's population and is the cradle of all World Religions and some of the most ancient cultures of the world. It is fast changing as well as most challenging. Though largely poor, it is rich in qualities, vision, values, insights and potential. But Christians represent 2 per cent of the population. Why ? Because Christianity has almost become a second-rate religion as it has lost its radicality in the life of the church as a whole.

1. Learning from Jesus rather than Learning about Jesus.

Thanks to Liberation Theologians for their studies on 'Jesus' option for the poor' and to Bible scholars of the last decade for their Life-of-Jesus Researches, we know more about Jesus' life and work and his mission and message. Today we know better and more clearly what Jesus was like before his death and resurrection. It has all come about as god-send, something like a climax to more than 200 years of Bible research.

In spite of it all, it is infinitely more fruitful to learn from Jesus than to learn about Jesus from others, to listen to Jesus of the gospels than

to hear anybody tell of such things, to contemplate his life and works than to ponder over all the dogmas defined of him. 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'¹, Jesus wants to remind us. The western lore, including dogmas, all couched in foreign language, culture and philosophy, in alien symbols and images is unintelligible to Asians and Africans and nobody has any right to ask us to gulp it down or to thrust it upon us. Jesus' Gospel, though rooted in Jewishness can be easily grasped and translated into our own as Paul so deftly did translate it into the Hellenistic culture.

We shall also have to re-read, re-think, re-interpret everything as the Spirit of Jesus enlightens us at the present changing times and situations and it will be immensely rewarding. Until recently we have been aping the West ignoring the native talents and resources. As we proceed with our re-reading and re-thinking new horizons will be opening up before us, and in the new light of the Holy Spirit we shall have new taste of and sharing in his infinite wisdom and knowledge. Those who stand in the way are enemies of Jesus Christ. The foregoing contributions in this issue of *Jeevadharma* show how the New Testament writers themselves have set examples to that effect.

2. The greatest of Jesus' Revelations

The greatest of all revelations of Jesus (and I hasten to add that this does not at all imply that Jesus was a revealer of truths) and the core of all his Gospel is that God is the most loving, gracious, compassionate Father/Mother, who is always with us as the heart of our hearts, who loves us inspite of our guilt, blindness and ingratitude, whose providence extends to the minutest details of our life² and tiniest things of the earth and of the whole universe.³

In the well-known parable, improperly titled the 'Prodigal Son', God is depicted as the father of two sons, of whom the younger was an outright prodigal and the elder selfish to the core. Which of the two was worse at the point when the story ends, we cannot tell! Well, the younger went to an alien country with his share of the patrimony and squandered all in loose living and was forced to work as a menial tending swine. Coming to his senses in his extreme penury and hunger he returns to his father, hoping at least to join his servants.

1. Jn 14:6

2. Mt 10:30

3. ib 10:29-31; Lk 12:24-30

When he was still a long way off, the father saw him and was moved with pity. He rushed to the boy, embraced him within his arms and kissed him and ordered a grand feast. But then the elder one, hot from the fields, was standing outside in strong protest and the father goes to passify him saying: "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right that we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life"⁴. That these acts and words of the father are not hollow, but full of meaning and significance for all humans, is amply borne out by the most cruel and ignominious death Jesus suffered and his prayer to the Father for his executioners as he hung agonising on the cross.

"You must call no one on earth father, since you have only one Father" who is God⁵. "You are all brothers and sisters"⁶, since you are sons and daughters of God. When the question was put to Jesus as to which was the greatest of the commandments he said categorically, repeating Dt⁷ & Lv⁸, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart.... You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets too"⁹. Jesus calls upon all to imitate God's love: "You must set no bounds to your love just as your heavenly Father sets none of his"¹⁰. "The Father causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good and send down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike."¹¹ Hence we have to love our enemies too. It has precedence over even any offering to God on the altar¹².

3. An unfathomable mystery

Here is one of the greatest of Divine mysteries. God's tenderest and most intimate love for us goes to the extent of identifying, as it were, our love of God and that of our neighbour, sometimes, it seems, giving preference to the latter¹³. Jesus literally throws in his lot with

4. Lk 15:11-37

5. Mt 23:9

6. ib 23:8

7. 6:5

8. 19:18

9. Mt 22:37-40

10. ib 5:48

11. ib 5:45

12. ib 5:23-24

13. Cf. ib 5:23-24

the last and the least and explicitly says: "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this (service) to one of the least of these brothers/sisters of mine, you did it to me"¹⁴. Again, "No human has ever seen God; if we love one another God abides in us and His love is perfected in us"¹⁵. Here we are not even asked to love God, but to love others, and it is by loving them that God's love is perfected in us.

The crux of almost all problems confronting churches and religions and social institutions lies here. No church is worth the name unless its motive force is genuine love. Without it the church will cease to be a living organism, but may continue to stay as an institution supported by laws and regulations and controlled by power structures.

4. Radical conversion

Such love cannot be had for the mere wishing. It requires a radical conversion, a re-birth in the Spirit, a complete transformation. Jesus when questioned by pharisees and scribes about his disciples' not following the tradition of the elders, replied: "This people honours me only with lip-service, but their *hearts* are far from me"¹⁶. Again Jesus says: "From the fulness of the *heart* the mouth speaks. Good people draw good things from their store of goodness, bad people draw bad things from their store of badness"¹⁷. To understand the real significance of these words of Jesus it is important to know what he meant by "heart". In Hebrew idiom it is not merely the seat of emotions as in modern speech, but the very source of thought, perceptions, volition, purpose and moral life, in other words, self at its deepest. So the Jewish people, say the Pharisees, for instance, noted for their staunch and sincere religiousness, with all their elaborate liturgy and meticulous observance of laws and traditions such as prolonged prayers at regular intervals, fasting and penance, giving alms, paying tithes etc. were rendering only lip-service, while their deep selves remained unaffected. This is an extremely serious evaluation of their lives, which can equally be applied to the church-life of today in general. We are satisfied with second-rate religion which does not penetrate our deeper self. It is extremely important for us the church including "magisterium" to take note of the following: With all our

14. ib 25:40

15. I Jn 4:12

16. Mk 7:6

17. Mt 12:34-35

solemn professions of beliefs and with our grand celebrations of liturgies we may have our hearts, I mean, our deepest selves unperturbed. Not that they are unimportant, not the least. But they can all be lip-service while the self at its deepest may continue to be selfish and so far from God¹⁸.

5. Complete surrender to God through Death of Self

What is the remedy? Jesus has taught us the way, not broad and easy, but hard and narrow. It is taken by putting one's complete trust in God, completely surrendering oneself to God, not trusting in any human or family or wealth or anything created - but loving them, of course, and caring for them, but trusting, No. No one can serve two masters. Either God or mammon, not together¹⁹. So serve God only,

This is easier said than done. No amount of self assurances, decisions, resolutions will do - all can remain lip-service. "Create in me a clean heart O' God"²⁰ must be our constant prayer together with our genuine endeavour.

Nothing but death can accomplish this - not physical, but the death of self. Denying oneself, taking up one's cross daily and following Jesus is the only way²¹. He is our way in his life and death. "Whoever seeks to gain life will lose it., but whoever loses his life will preserve it"²². It is a life-long process without any let-up, without any intermission. "This internal dying has two closely related dimensions of meaning. On the one hand it is a dying of the self as the centre of its own concern. On the other hand, it is a dying to the world as the centre of security and identity. These are the two great rival centres to centering in God, and the path of transformation thus involves a dying to both of them"²³

Jesus says "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill treat you... Treat others as you would like people to treat you. If you love those who love

18. Cf Marcus J. Borg, *JESUS a new vision*, SPCK, 1993, p.109

19. Mt 6:24

20. Ps 51:12

21. Mk 8:34

22. Lk 17:33

23. Borg, ib p.113

you. what credit can you expect? Even sinners do that much...But love your enemies and do good to them...and you will be children of the Most High, for He Himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked²⁴.

6. Soaring Heights of Love

Only those who have gone through the death of self can obey this bidding. "Most people", says G.B.Caird ²⁵ "- even sinners- have a rough and ready ethic based on common sense, enlightened self-interest, give-and-take; and they can claim to be as good as their neighbours. But the followers of Jesus must go further. The Christian Ethic is Ethics Part II". But I doubt if this Part II is taught at length in any of our seminaries though it should be done unfailingly and primarily.

There are very significant differences between the two Parts or systems:

1. Jesus distinguishes what is good from what is merely right, while other systems distinguish what is right from what is wrong.
2. Jesus is not satisfied with doing duty alone, while others are content with doing duties.
 - a. Love grasps opportunities, but duty is content with merely obeying rules.
 - b. Love is spontaneous and therefore gracious, but duty acts under constraint.
 - c. Love expects nothing in return, but duty expects to be rewarded or recompensed or at least recognised. To love like that is to be sons and daughters of the Most High.²⁶

Today the Church life has lost much of the radicality of the gospel of Jesus. It is this radicality in the love-life of Mother Teresa that is being appreciated the whole world over. It is also acknowledged that a tiny minority of brothers and sisters including bishops in the Church, though unknown to the world at large are doing heroic service, some in remote villages with people wallowing in extreme want and dirt and some in different places of India engaged in the liberation of the poor and oppressed and of bonded labourers. It is they who are witnessing to the purity of the gospel and not the vast majority with their correct

24. Lk 6:27-35

25. *Saint Luke*, Penguin, 1963, p.104

26. Cf ib

doctrines and meticulously performed prayers but with their deepest self unaffected.

7. Concept and Exercise of Authority Revolutionised

In keeping with this Gospel of love and kenosis of life and death Jesus revolutionised the concept and practice of authority among his disciples. Jesus knew too well that the spirit of domination is so tenacious of life that the ministers might easily turn Masters, nay princes and kings, when surrounded by slavish officials and stately splendour. So he solemnly forewarned, "you know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No. Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant and any one who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many²⁷. This instance of Jesus' teaching alone will drive home to anyone lording it over others, whatever high position he holds in any part of the world, that he is totally unworthy of being Jesus' disciple, that by doing so he is abusing Church authority, that he is excommunicating himself from the Church with all its consequences. Jesus repeated this revolutionary teaching several times, viz., in two sets of parallel passages in synoptics²⁸ and lastly in Jesus' parable of action²⁹, exactly parallel to the institution of the Eucharist in Synoptics with a call to do as he himself did³⁰.

A second-rate-religion can read all these and interpret them in such a way as to fall back on its former position. The power-structures and the powers that be turned domineering and lording it over will continue as long as their deepest self remains unaffected. Any re-reading of the Gospel or re-thinking of Jesus' life will be interdict to it.

8. The Grand Inquisitor

There is an interesting episode in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Karamasov Brothers*³¹, wherein Ivan introduces his poem entitled "The Grand Inquisitor" to his brother Alyosha, which was meant to add

27. Mt 20:25-28

28. Mt 18:1-5;Mk 9:33-37;Lk 9:46-49, again Mk10:42-45;Mt 20:25-26;Lk 22:25-27

29. Cf Jn 13:3-5

30. Cf my article in *Jeevadhara* 58, 1980, pp.286-301

31. Cf Vol.1, *Raduga Mosco*, 1990, pp.322-341

a spiritual depth to the Novel and bring into focus various theological and philosophical problems, some of which are not less relevant today. The Grand Inquisitor was notorious for burning "heretics" at the stake. Now it so happened that Jesus came to join the toiling masses of the place, having taken pity on them and on account of their pressing and incessant prayer and was moving among them exactly as in his Galilean days of the first century, giving sight to the blind and raising the dead to life. The Grand Inquisitor passing that way chanced to see the enthusiastic crowd and recognised Jesus among them. Straight away he ordered his guards to take Jesus to prison. The crowd like one man bowed down to the ground before the Inquisitor who gave them a silent blessing and passed on. At the dead of night the Inquisitor visits Jesus in prison, asking "Is it you? What is there for you to say? You have no right to add anything to what you already said in the past. Why have you come to get in our way? Did you not say often, 'I will make you free'? Now you have seen these free people. They themselves have brought their freedom to us and laid it at our feet. There exist three forces - the only ones on earth capable of overcoming and holding them captives for all time, the miraculous, the mysterious and authority. You rejected all these as against the tempter in the desert. We have rectified your work and grounded it on the above three; we are one with him (the tempter) and not with you. Know that I too have lived in the wilderness, that I too blessed the freedom you blessed men with. But I came to my senses and joined the host of those who rectified your work." The Inquisitor went on in that flippant way and fell silent and waited to hear his captive's reply. Jesus drew near to him and kissed him gently in his bloodless lips. That was the entire reply. The old man got startled, went to the door and shouted: "Go and return no more" and left Jesus into the darkness.

Though Ivan's poem was refuted by his brother Alyosha himself, it raises certain important questions even today, which need answers or explanations. Only a few pertinent points are touched here.

9. Freedom and Coresponsibility: characteristic of the church

Why is the official church afraid of freedom? What forced the great theologian the late Cardinal Karl Rahner to write: "St. Paul spoke of the freedom of the Christian. After that this particular topic was no longer mentioned very much"³².

32. Theological Investigations II, 1963, p.89

Now no body will deny that Jesus wanted all people to be free. Some biblical scholars have encapsulated the historical Jesus as 'a remarkably free man'.³³ Jesus says: "If you remain in my word you will indeed be my disciples, you will come to know the truth and the truth will make you free." And what is this truth that makes us free? Jesus immediately adds: "If the Son sets you free you will indeed be free."³⁴ He is the truth that frees, that liberates us. He is the Life that gives the freedom of the children of God, the freedom unlimited that is motivated and constrained always by love; not by self-love which is sin and slavery but by 'Agape' which makes humans brothers and sisters. This is the secret of freedom that is implied in Jesus' declaration that all commandments can be summed up and fulfilled in the double commandment of love; in his exempting his disciples from the law of fasting for no other reason than their being with him; in his breaking the rules of sabath and in his solemn declaration that sabath was made for humans and not humans for sabath. He indicted in the strongest language the scribes and pharisees for their legalism and for their laying the burden of innumerable rules and regulations on the shoulders of the people.

St. Paul of all the Apostles grasped the implications of this gospel of freedom. His own experience was one of total freedom from all external and internal compulsions. So Paul says: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery."³⁵ Yoke here means all that went to make up the socio-religious life of the Jews - thus repudiating the law and for that matter, all laws entirely and completely. It is God in Christ who saved us and not we ourselves. It is his grace that made us whole and not any of our works. As a staunch pharisee he was all respect for the law. So he says, law is holy and just and good³⁶. But then in the same letter he calls it the law of sin and death³⁷. During the time of Paul law had assumed an absolute value. A Jew could keep the law and hold even God indebted to him. If such was the position law had come to hold then that law was the law of sin and death. "Christ has annulled in his flesh the law with its regulations and rules"³⁸ and not only the law but

33. Cf. Borg, ib p.191

34. Jn 8:31-32,36

35. Gal 5:1

36. Rom 7:12

37. ib 8:2

38. Eph. 2:15

all laws except one - it is the law of the Spirit³⁹, the law of faith⁴⁰, the law of love,⁴¹ if it could be called law at all. Hereafter nothing should be done or not done from any exterior compulsion that would be unworthy of the children of God. As Fr. Harrington says, "Obedience is human response to God's offer of salvation - faith is obedience"⁴². St. Paul writes to Philemon: "I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion, but of your own free will"⁴³. Paul realised his freedom by making himself everybody's slave in all sincerity and love: "Though I was not a slave to any human being I became a slave to all"⁴⁴. It shows how very God-like his freedom was. Freedom lives by dying to self and grows by self-giving. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"⁴⁵. Mark the words! So if there is no freedom where would the Spirit be? All this shows clearly that freedom in love is the most characteristic of the Christian Church. How meticulously should the freedom of the members be preserved and protected, which no authority can curtail or encroach upon.

There is, of course, a power for evil inherent in human freedom and so safeguards are required. But they should not be such as would stifle freedom. Love can find its own safeguards for freedom which is its fruit.

But the history of the Church till Vatican II presents sorry testimonies of its confrontations with freedom. For a few instances, the great Thomas Aquinas was once condemned, St. Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake, Savonarola was tortured and burnt alive, Ignatius Loyola was constantly molested and spied on. Teilhard de Chardin was exiled. Why, even the great theologian of the Church the late Cardinal Yves Congar's book on *Right and Wrong Reforms in the Church*, if what we heard was correct, was informally on the Index until our good Pope John XXIII called him and congratulated him especially on it and Vatican II approved of his writings.

It was for the first time in the history of the Church that an ecumenical Council - Vatican II came out with a clear declaration on

39. Rom 8:1

40. ib 3:27

41. Gal 5:14

42. Cf. Jeevadhara 58, p. 295

43. Phlm. 14

44. 1Cor. 9:19

45. 2 Cor. 13:17

universal religious freedom that is based on the nature and dignity of the human person thus confirming it for all humans of all times. There was also an historic penitent confession of the Church's grave failings in the past with regard to this freedom. Christ bore witness to the truth but "refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it"⁴⁶. The Council also "recognised for all the faithful freedom of enquiry, of thought and of expression"⁴⁷.

Authority turned domineering is the enemy of freedom. It started as such from the time of the Emperor Constantine and has almost come to stay. As Yves Congar has so rightly said, "The Church is wholly responsible for the idea that her hierachial ministers have of the nature of their authority and for the way in which they exercise it. If they are treated as potentates they will become potentates. If they are deferred to with servility it will be too easy for them to let their lives be ruined by the spirit of domination which is very tenacious of life in the heathen that still survives in each one of us"⁴⁸. This does not need any explanation. The only way open to the whole Church is not to let authority dominate us.

The whole World Church is today assessed, controlled, directed and guided by western norms which to the wide non-western world are totally alien in language, images, symbols, culture, thought patterns, philosophy, even church discipline. This is clearly an encroachment on the freedom and autonomy and integrity and individuality of local Churches the world over. Here we may aptly quote *Concilium*⁴⁹ about the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: It is "a vain attempt to define the catholic faith and morals without observing either the letter or the spirit of Vatican II, leaving aside the various continents and ignoring the results of theological scholarship". Let us take another instance: For an African Synod of Bishops recently held, hundreds of bishops of that large and ancient continent with their retinues had to be transported to Rome from their congenial and cultural surroundings. Why this mountain waste and sea of inconveniences? - for the convenience of a few Roman officials? or for exerting undue influence on them in their out of home and alien surroundings? We leave it all without comment. If only the remarkable words of Yves Congar resounded in our ears!

46. DH no. 96

47. GS 59b; LG 37

48. *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Chapman, 1964, p.105

49. 1994/5, p.10

Humankind has come of age. Jesus made us free that we might be fully human and lead a truly authentic life worthy of the children of God. Jesus freed us from the law and all kinds of domination of authority so that nothing should be done under compulsion either from inside or from outside but only out of pure love of the children of the Most High. Jesus' declaration that sabbath is for the human and not the human for sabbath gives precedence to humans as sons and daughters of God over any law.

10. Understanding of faith

Why does the official Church appear to be against all creative thinking of theologians and other scholars and try to put a lid on it? There are a few points worth our close attention and consideration here. First St Paul's outburst against Judaisers among Galatians⁵⁰ has been interpreted one-sided. "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than that I have preached to you let that one be accursed (anathema)". It was above all emotional. Even the word 'anathema' originally meant 'a votive offering set in a temple'. Only afterwards it had the transferred meaning of 'accursed'. In similar cases Paul's openness, toleration and accommodation could be noted: Why even Paul had Timothy circumcised and he himself submitted to nazirite vow ritual.

Secondly, how tolerant does Jesus in the Gospels show himself to be: When James and John saw that Samaritans would not receive Jesus because he was making for Jerusalem they said, Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up, Jesus turned and rebuked them⁵¹. Again when John said that as they saw someone driving out devils in Jesus' name, they tried to stop him, Jesus said to them, "You must not stop him, anyone who is not against you is for you⁵². Jesus generously assures us that those who believe in him would do even greater works⁵³

Thirdly, the subject we are dealing with is God's revelations, the mysterious ways and works of God which cannot be fully grasped and expressed by our limited minds and less limited languages. God's mysteries can never be encapsulated in dogmatic formulas which are

50. Cf. Gal 1:8

51. Lk 9:54-55

52. ib 49-50

53. Jn 14:12

always time-bound and culturally conditioned. They change, shed their meanings and either acquire new ones or become obsolete. If they are set as eternal norms to judge, assess or control all creative thinking it is the dead end of it. It is false certainty, no real understanding. It is the end of research. "Such bias inhibits all radical questions and even methodological doubt. It prevents Christians from effectively participating in the contemporary quest for the ever new horizons of truth".⁵⁴

Fourthly, as Walbert Buhlmann says: Roman authority has reacted diffidently to scientific progress, viewing it in a conservative spirit. The same attitude has been adopted though more forthrightly towards theological progress. During the first meeting of the International Theological Commission held in Rome, 1969, Karl Rahner showed clearly how this authoritative intervention during the last hundred years has indeed been a real defence of the faith, but a sterile defence, not aiming at a positive integration of new problems. Almost everything said by the Roman Departments on Biblical questions in the hundred years previous to Vatican II has become obsolete and is not taken into account by any one now⁵⁵. That the original drafts prepared by the Roman Congregations for Vatican II, but rejected by the Council is in living memory.

11. The Present Set-up of the Church

Has the Church "rectified" Jesus' work as the Inquisitor claims, and grounded it on the miraculous, the mysterious and authority?

The second sub-heading of Ch. IV of *Lineamenta*, namely, "Jesus Christ: the Church's Gift to Asia" is so typical of the Grand Inquisitor's stand on Authority. It implies the Church's holding a sort of monopoly on Jesus Christ. Such a claim by the Church authority would meet with a rebuff from the Asian people as in Acts:⁵⁶ "Jesus I know.... but who are you?"

There is all difference between the presence of the Spirit in the Church and experience of the same Spirit. Despite the Spirit's presence in the church the vast majority of its members including magisterium may not have spirit-filled experience. Love loses its christian savour. As Authority turns domination the miraculous and the mysterious descend to the level of superstition. *Ecclesia semper*

54. Jeevadhara 13,p.64

55. *The Coming of the Third Church*, St. Paul's, England, 1976, p.179

56. 19:15

reformanda., Hence Vatican II was God-send. Vatican III is the immediate need.

The authority in the Church seems to think that governing is their greatest responsibility, if not the only one, whereas Jesus explicitly wants it to be service in its true sense as he himself came to serve to the end. Heaven and earth will not come tumbling down if authority in the Church ceases to be mainly rulers or governors, if each continent looks after all church services in its own language and culture, beliefs and values, thought patterns and theology, liturgy and spirituality, Church discipline and pastoral work, and, above all, evangelization, of course, in union with the whole Church. "Rome is now", as Walbert Buhlmann says, "not at the centre of the world, but rather on the edge. Peter, indeed, remains forever the foundation of the Church. But the contingent circumstance that he lived and died in Rome must not be made too much of as if the Catholic Church stood or fell with Rome."⁵⁷

All this will fall on deaf ears unless the central administration of the Church is drastically changed. Vatican II wanted reform of the Roman Curia. There have been clamours from different parts of the world by different Institutions for such a change not only of the Roman Curia, but also of Pontifical Commissions and Papal Delegates: In spite of the lengthy decrees for reform, real reform is still to come. And it will never come unless the Pope decides to bring about a drastic change. But they say that the Pope once (1870-1929) a prisoner of Vatican is still a prisoner in Vatican ringed with the bureaucracy⁵⁸. At the Synod of Bishops in 1974 Archbishop A. Lordscheider said that the idea of the hierarchical Church as the Centre of all rights and all powers has impaired and is still impairing efforts to spread God's Kingdom. Pope John XXIII said, "We are not here on earth to be curators of a museum but to cultivate a garden full of flowers and life". Yet another point to make is that Vatican II in a way was a rethinking of Vatican I. The Synod of Bishops was meant to be eventually a Deliberative Body, as the Bishops are not delegates of the Pope, but real pastors with the Pope. But it still remains a consultative body. Why? They are so passive and do not exercise their prophetic role as they ought.

I have noticed several bishops and theologians in their speeches and writings dare not say a word against the status quo. We know that in the Synods the bishops after lengthy discussions and fact-findings almost slavishly leave everything to the Pope for the final statement.

57. Buhlmann, ib pp 180-181

58. Cf. ib. P.187

That means the drafting would fall into the hands of the curial officials while the bishops would be far better qualified to make the drafts. As long as the world bishops - Asian, African, S. American and all do not exercise their role as Pastors of the universal Church and prophets very little good can be expected from such Synods. The Roman curia would see that the whole church dance to its tune.⁵⁹

12. Revolutionising the concept and practice of Authority

In order to revolutionise the concept and practice of the present day authority in the Church and to bring it in tune with the Gospel ideal, bishops (cardinals not excluded) have to come down from their thrones and work among the poor and the oppressed without distinction of caste or class or creed, as Jesus did. They have to serve the last and the least without which washing the legs of an elite on Maunday Thursday would be a sham. Any way, they all need an exposure programme of staying a week or two with our slum-dwellers. This is the primary ordination without which the church's ordination loses its mainstay.

As a result of the most recent Life-of-Jesus researches, we know that Jesus was deeply involved in the Social World of his time, "not only living in it and to some extent shaped by it but also intensely concerned with its shape and direction. He radically criticised it, warned it of the historical consequences of its present path and sought its transformation in accord with an alternative vision".⁶⁰ Jesus knew the social world he lived in, with its hierarchical and patriarchal order, with its divisions of Jew and Gentile, man and woman, sacred and profane, pure and impure, clean and unclean etc. A broad division would be the righteous and the wicked and the latter included not only murderers, extortioners, prostitutes and publicans, but all other outcasts also. Jesus opted for the latter and announced a definite programme of action at the Nazareth synagogue. There he read out the following text from Isaiah⁶¹ with certain changes made in order to make its social message clear:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me
for he has anointed me
to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberation to captives
recovery of sight to the blind
to let the oppressed go free.⁶²

59. Cf. ib. P.185

60. Borg, ib p.16

61. 61:1-2

62. Lk 4:18-19

Jesus emphatically declared that that text of Isaiah was being fulfilled that very day even as his audience were listening to him.

13. The Jesus movement

Jesus "went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and illness among the people"⁶³. "Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages.... proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd."⁶⁴

This Jesus movement through Palestine was extraordinary in many respects, even revolutionary in its vision and way of life. In the place of the All-Holy, unapproachable, transcendent divine mystery, God was proclaimed as the compassionate Parent of all humans and all the more compassionate to sinners. Jesus, curing the sick and caring for the poor and afflicted was the image of the compassionate God.

The main objective of the Jesus Movement was preaching the gospel to the poor, as is clear from the Nazareth declaration. The spirit of the Lord "has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor",⁶⁵. The sermon on the Mount is its emphatic proclamation⁶⁶. Again, it is repeated in answer to the query of John the Baptist's disciples, if he was the one to come: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard..... the gospel is proclaimed to the poor"⁶⁷. Here Jesus was challenging the deep-rooted misconception among the Jews that poverty was the result of lawlessness and so the poor deserved no help or sympathy. Jesus so identifies himself with them that whatever is done to the least of them is done to himself.

Another exceptional feature of the Jesus Movement was 'table fellowship' eating or rather banqueting with out-casts. Bible researchers claim that such banqueting was a regular feature of the Jesus Movement. An ordinary host would know how disgusting and even nauseating it would be to have dinner with a motley crowd of outcasts. Only real love like that of Jesus with intense Abba-experience would make it elevating and exhilarating to the poor and outcasts.

A third exceptional characteristic of the Movement was the presence of women in the group. This was in a society where the

63. Mt 4:23

65. Lk 4:18

67. ib 7:20-22

64. ib 9:35-36

66. ib 6:20-23

appearance of women in public was taboo and talking with them outside their homes was forbidden. "Indeed this radical attitude of the Jesus Movement towards women was already modified within the Church before the NT was even completed. Cultural attitudes from Jewish and broader Mediterranean world had begun to cloud the vision generated by the Spirit" ⁶⁸. It continues to this day in the Church.

Here is an itinerant community with Jesus at the centre, who is the image of the compassionate God. The community consisted of men and women, Peter and John, Joanna and Susanna, to mention a few, and Thomas who was ready to go and die with Jesus and Judas Iscariot who was to betray Jesus, to mention another pair. They all left bag and baggage to throw in their lot with Jesus. Sometimes they had to starve⁶⁹ and sometimes they had to spend the night in the open⁷⁰. Jesus so gracious and compassionate was often surrounded with the blind and deaf and dumb and lame and paralised, with lepers and the otherwise afflicted, with slaves and bonded labourers, with publicans and prostitutes and women with children. Jesus spoke to them about the compassionate God who is the most loving Parent and before whom there is no distinction of Jew or Gentile, man or woman, rich or poor, righteous or wicked, caste or outcast. They are all children of the loving and provident Parent.

This is the kind of Evangelization that is expected of us all as disciples of Jesus Christ. It consists in our proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to the poor and in our loving and caring for them as he did. True disciples of Jesus cannot but involve themselves in the socio-political life of the country.

But this has to be done in our own way, taking into consideration the changed circumstances of time and place, in the context of the plurality of our cultures and religions and the state of our development and the quality of our talents. Asian people are largely poor. To take India's case in particular, as a result of the over-all domination both before and after Independence, first by the colonial powers and then by our political leaders, the people have become dependent and helpless and have almost ceased to react against the most revolting atrocities and alarming corruption. So the first requisite for the liberation of the people from their present woes is self-reliance. They should have their freedom restored. They should get themselves empowered. Liberation, therefore, means the restoration of voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless.

68. Borg, ib p.135

69. Mt 8:20

70. ib 12:3

14. Empowerment of the people with the cooperation of all without any distinction of caste, class or creed.

In India the work for liberation has become easier now that the Panchayati Raj has been promulgated and has become part of the law of the country. Through this legislation a golden opportunity is provided for the people to regain, at least partially, their lost freedom and power. GRAMA SABHA which is the assembly of all voters of a Panchayat ward has by now assumed greatest significance. In and through grama sabhas people can assert their power, question the ward members whom they have elected asking them to render an account of the money that has been allotted for the development of the respective wards. The elected members of the Panchayat, for the first time in the history of the country, have to meet the people of their respective wards in the grama sabhas at least twice a year to consult them, submit accounts, invite suggestions from them and enlist their cooperation in the developmental work of the Panchayat wards.

For all this, the people have to be rightfully conscientised, activated and empowered. But it is not an easy job. As far as Kerala is concerned, unlike many other states, each ward which is the smallest unit of a panchayat, consists of 500 to 700 families and of 1500 to 2500 or more voters. So grama sabhas cannot be conscientised at a stretch. The best way would be to form "neighbourhood communities" throughout the ward, each consisting of 30 to 50 families without any distinction of caste, creed, colour or class, who can conveniently meet and commune together and discuss matters concerning them. There is nothing technical about what we call "neighbourhood communities". They are the coming-together of neighbours. The first and last objective of this get-together is to foster inter-family and inter-personal relationship among neighbours. But they should never work as islands but be open on all sides so as to welcome anyone from outside the groups.. The process of forming neighbourhood communities should go on until the whole ward eventually becomes one such community. As we said earlier, the main objective of such communities is to foster neighbourliness, to be more and more intimate with one another, to help, cooperate and share with one another; to think, discuss and communicate with one another; to find out ways and means of carrying out a project useful for the group and ultimately for the whole ward etc. Such neighbourhood communities could eventually be people's schools in the true sense, making up for the lack of present day education⁷¹.

When such communities have been formed throughout the ward, they can delegate four to six persons from among them, consisting of

71. Cf. My article in Malayalam *Jeevadhara* 139 Pp. 62-73

equal number of men and women to the grama sabha to represent them as the community's spokespersons. Thus grama sabhas could be activated and strengthened for the good of all.

In conscientising and empowering grama sabhas through neighbourhood communities, emphasis has to be laid on *neighbourliness* and *self-reliance*. The former comes of genuine love, that is love pure and simple and the latter comes of real freedom without which no liberation is possible. With these two supreme values, all others follow, for there is no genuine love without justice and no real freedom without truth. These are the supreme values of the Kingdom, for which Jesus stood, lived and died.

15. Evangelisation of Asia

We have been speaking and writing unceasingly about Evangelisation and rightly so. But we shall have no right to do so unless we are prepared to live our faith radically and committedly, without which it would all be mere 'gong booming or cymbal clashing'. There are many challenges and surprises for us in the Mission statistics of 1990s, though I wonder how such details have been arrived at. Christians are only 1/3 of the world's population. Out of the 60% of the world's population in Asia, hardly 2% are christians. More than 23% of all peoples in the world have never come into contact with Christ, Christianity or the Gospel. Of all our discussions and publications concerning evangelisation at least 99% address only Christians and of all foreign missionaries 91% target the Christian world with 90% of all evangelisation efforts directed towards those who are at least nominally Christian. Only 3% of all christians have contact with people of other faiths. Another embarrassing fact is that the Christian World spends 99% of its income on itself. To complete the list, by the year 2000 catholics will be outnumbered by Islam⁷². So what does all our talk come to?

Considering the Asian context of pluralism of religions and cultures the best way of introducing Christianity seems to be our going on pilgrimage with other religions. There was a time when we did go it alone to the complete exclusion of others in a continent and in a country where world Religions are jostling with one another.

We profess to be followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. Now Jesus taught not so much a new religion as what a true religion should be. And what is the central theme of his teachings? God is the Parent and the whole humankind God's family, and what is his greatest and all embracing commandment? Love for all humans without any exception. All men and women are God's children and so brothers

72. Cf. James H. Kroeger, *Living Mission*, Orbis, 1993, P.3

and sisters to one another. This is the core of Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom.

Who then sowed the seeds of division and dissension among God's family members? Judging from externals, do we not hold a sort of monopoly on Jesus Christ, priding ourselves on being Christian and setting others off as non-Christian. Have not the Church's power structures particularly, with its politics and economics, its rituals and rubrics – almost all human-made – nullified the word of God such as the following: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"⁷³ as against all division; "you are all brothers and sisters. You shall not be called teacher for you have only one teacher. You must not call any one father for you have only one Father. The greatest among you must be your servant"⁷⁴ as against all power-structures; "The sabbath was made for the human, not the human for sabbath". The hour is now when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth"⁷⁵ as against rituals? It is here that the Church must exercise *kenosis*.

Jesus Christ has been designated by God to play the central role in history through his death and resurrection. We shall have to present him not in any traditional garb, definitely not in dogmatic formulas. It is from our experience of him that we have to discover new ways of dialoguing with other religions and of carrying on evangelisation to those who have not heard of him. In taking to new ways we should be prepared to meet disapproval from certain quarters where they are ready to judge with their dogmatic and alien norms. They often continue to view the way they have been used to for centuries, unable to see beyond the dogmatic formulas and western cultural patterns the infinitely rich and multifarious aspects of divine revelation. Vatican II has acknowledged, though sparingly, grace, truth, goodness, profound religious sense etc. in non-Christian religions, thus recognising in them seeds of the word and fruits of the Spirit.

We profess our staunch faith in Jesus Christ. At the same time it must be admitted that the transcendental reality of the Logos, to use a western expression, had not been or could not be exhausted by Jesus' earthly existence nor should the 'particular historical and cultural forms in which his relations with the Father were realised be absolutised'. We should confess once for all that we have had exaggerated notions of our faith and the Scriptures. We needn't them. The sooner we are rid of them the brighter would our faith shine out and the better would God's wonders in Jesus be revealed.

73. Mt. 22:39

74. ib 23:8-11

75. Jn 4: 23

Conclusion

The Church becomes a second-rate religion when the radicality of the Gospel is lost on it but such a religion is no religion at all. Authority will begin to raise its ugly head. It starts with the question: 'To rule or to serve?' and ends with the answer: 'Only to rule and never to serve'. It tears apart from the people and lords it over them through laws and regulations of its own making, whereas they should have been determinations of the Church community as a whole. The Church thus turns a social structure or organisation with no love lost in it and no service except that of give-and-take or of enlightened self-interest. Such a church will never exert any salutary influence on Asia, the cradle of World Religions noted for interiority, religiousness and experience of the Divine. There are no two ways about it for the Church except its own kenosis out of which will rise pure love and service for the whole humanity, without any distinction of Christian or non-Christian.

J. Constantine Manalel

BOOK REVIEW

Rudolf V.D'Souza, *THE BHAGAVAD GITA AND ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE DYNAMISM OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE PROCESS OF GOD-REALIZATION*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1996 pp. 483 US \$ 33.00

The book is a doctoral thesis of the author in the field of spirituality done at the Gregorian University, Rome, under the direction of Fr. Herbert Alphonso S.J. In the spirit of inter-religious dialogue the book seeks to bring out the dynamic workings of the Spirit of God as seen in the Bhagavad Gita tradition and explained in the writings of St. John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic. The book naturally consists of three parts, the first dealing with the Gita, the second about the teachings of St. John of the Cross and the third a comparison of the two. The study is comparative in nature, "restricted to the doctrine of the BG and to some relevant passages from the writings of St. John of the Cross that speak of the dynamism of spiritual growth." (p.8). The obvious limitations of such a comparative study is recognized at the very outset: Since the two objects of study being directed to radically different traditions it is difficult to find clear and definite similarities between them. The terminologies for spiritual experience differ. A hasty judgment about their spiritual doctrines can vitiate the comparison itself. Since any spiritual doctrine is located in the context of the totality of the particular religion, the study done by a Christian can only be from the Christian standpoint, so the methodology used is to restrict it mainly to "a critical analysis of the different texts and words in both the traditions concerning the dynamism of spiritual growth towards God-realization" (p.10) The point of convergence is that the experience of God-realization is the goal or the end of the whole process of the spiritual dynamism of the BG, and also that the central thrust of the writings of St. John of the Cross is to lead the ardent soul further towards union with and transformation into God through an ongoing spiritual dynamic process. Both of them stress the *yoga/marga* or way.

BG advocates theism with the acceptance of the Supreme Personal God and the complementarity of the three margas, karma, jnana and bhakti. Though ancient acaryas like Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva differed regarding the priority among these paths modern thinkers like Radhakrishnan and T.M.P. Mahadevan consider the three margas as complementary providing for the growth of the cognitive, intellectual and affective aspects of the human personality, leading to salvation and union with God. It has, however, to be admitted that "in Hinduism the concept of a 'Personal God' was slow to evolve (p. 57), since during most of its history the impersonal (nirguna) and personal (saguna) perceptions of God formed parallel paths. Gita's unique contribution is that it depicted the Supreme Being of the Upanishads in the person of Krishna, the chief among the ten avatars who stirs hearts to love and devotion, and is addressed by terms such as *prabhu*, lord, *sarvalokesvara*, the lord of the whole world, *bhagavan*, adorable, and *Isvara*, Lord of all. He is both transcendent, the supreme Brahman: "I am not in them; they are in me" (BG VII, 12); and also immanent, dwelling in the hearts of all (BG XV, 15 & XVIII, 61).

Krishna is the God of love, and in a number of places the Gita asserts his special predilection for his devotees (BG XII, 14-20). God deeply concerned with the salvation of human beings stimulates in them respect, awe and spiritual growth. On the other hand, human beings themselves are the second principal agents in the process of spiritual growth. Against the background of the Vedas and the Upanishads the Gita conceives man as a unity of purusha and prakrti, spirit and matter. The word *atman* stands primarily for the functioning of the vital core of any reality. There is, however, no absolute distinction between the 'self' *purusha* and the *psychosomatic* organism to which it is attached. The individual self is an essential part of man and is identified with the *atman*.

The Gita starts with the distressed and confused state of mind of Arjuna, and the first three chapters highlight work as the central theme and lead to the initiation of the dynamism of *karma* with the injunction: Work always (III,8) for the sake of self-purification (V,11). Along with this is emphasized the performance of duty leading to the concept of detachment, and self-sacrifice through virtuous life. The culmination of the path of action is attachment to Krishna: "Cast all your works on me" (III,30). Then the path opens out into the level of *jnana* or knowledge: "Only the ignorant and not the wise speak of the path of knowledge and path of action as different." (V,4). The learned and the awakened combine action and knowledge (IV,19). But there is a difference between knowledge as an intellectual perfection and knowledge as spiritual wisdom. Gita itself distinguishes three kinds of knowledge *sattvika*, *rajasika* and *tamasika*. Only the *sattvika* kind which avoids all attachment to material objects, pride and conceit, lead to wisdom and devotional attachment to the Lord. At the stage of the intensity of the path of knowledge one crosses over to the state of liberation and equanimity and is bestowed the highest *bhakti* or devotion (XIII,10). But there is a lower devotion which is little more than conventional piety and a higher devotion by which one enters into the Lord (VIII, 5; XIII,18).

St. John of the Cross having entered the Carmelite Order in 1563 and ordained a priest in 1567 joined the reform movement of Teresa of Avila in 1568. Arrested and kept in prison by those against the reform he had his intense spiritual experience and composed his most precious poems in prison. Escaping from the prison with his writings he became leader of the reformation. His writings consist of less than a thousand pages in prose consisting mainly of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle* and *the Living Flame of Love* and about thousand poetic verses. His brevity, however, is more than compensated by the uniformly high quality of his writings. The author points out that the central dynamics of his *Ascentis* "the purification of the senses and a progressive authentication of the three theological virtues." (p. 188). The word 'nada' is used mainly in relation to the act of negation, purification and detachment. The *Dark Night* emphasizes the passive dimension of the purification. *The Canticle* develops the perspective of the exercise of love between the soul and the Spouse Christ develops the traditional three ways of purgative, illuminative and unitive stages of perfection. *The Living Flame* deals with the Trinitarian dimension of spiritual life, the action of the Holy Spirit and the principles of the glorification of man.

In John's perspective it is God who manifests himself and goes in search of man. Without God's sharing with man, man cannot give back anything to God. The Triune God lives and has his temple in man. In the final encounter with God the soul finds its individual relation to the three divine Persons. God is both Father and Mother. Besides being an immense Father, God's motherly nature makes man approach him with firm courage and sweetness. It is by sharing in the Son's mysteries that a movement is produced in the substance of the soul of man. Christ is both the means and goal of spiritual achievement. In this process of spiritual growth the Holy Spirit acts as the mover. Thus in spiritual life God is both transcendent and immanent. As an artist and a mystic John speaks often

about the beauty, splendour and loveliness of God. In the culminating stage of union and transformation, the dynamism of God is experienced in the soul through the flames of love. This flame becomes so dynamic that it transforms the soul into love.

The third chapter, rather a long section of the whole book (pp. 243-328) gives a detailed analysis of the three classical ways of perfection, which John explains without restricting himself to any traditional outlines. The relevance of this long study in a comparison of the doctrine of John with the Gita is not very evident. It is very informative for those unfamiliar with the Western systems of spirituality.

The scope of the third part namely of comparison between the two systems seems very limited by the cautious directives of the ecclesiastical authorities to look in other religions only for "elements which are true and good" (LG 16), "precious things both religious and human" (GS 92), "seeds of contemplation," (AG 18) "elements of truth and grace" (EN n. 80), "the semina verbi present in the great traditions of the Far East, in order to trace common path against the backdrop of the needs of the contemporary world" (Joh Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* n. 81). There are, of course, various parallel elements in the two traditions, like the freedom and initiative of God, the freedom of God both in the *avatara* and the Incarnation, and various elements of dynamic unity. But the author adds a note of caution that there is no full agreement: "Krishna has shown the way but has not lived it;... He did not offer a practical example as Christ offered through his life... It is quite difficult also to reach a common understanding regarding the 'salvation' wrought by Krishna and Christ" (p 349). There are, however, various analogies like the Hindu *Maya* and John's *Dark Night*, the various attributes of God, the structure of man, and especially the three dynamic "ways".

What is really disappointing about the book is that it does not show to Indian spirituality the basic courtesy the early Church showed to Greek spirituality. When Christianity went from Palestine to the Greek world, the Gentile converts who formed the majority of the members of the Church led to the adoption of the Greek way of thinking to express and explain Christian faith. The anthropomorphic system of Judaic spirituality was completely replaced by the Greek spiritual thinking represented by Plato, the Stoics and Plotinus. There was no hesitation on account of the doctrinal inadequacies of the religions of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. What was taken over was a method of thinking. Should not the same respect be shown to Indian spiritual thinking and its method of interiority without quarreling about the great diversity of doctrines behind it, Buddhist, Hindu and Jainist of which all Gita is a judicious synthesis? After all, what is unique in John of the Cross is essentially Greek. The three ways were solidly lifted from the Greeks. Even his mysticism owed a great deal to Plotinus, Ps Dionysius and Evagrius Ponticus. The very method of writing a poem and writing a commentary on it was borrowed from the Arabs. The book has a wealth of information that can benefit all. But my complaint is that it has not done justice to the spiritual tradition of India which is not exclusive to the Hindus or Buddhists but belongs to Christians also.

John B. Chethimattam

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Printed at Theocentre Press, Kottayam – 686 041
and Published at Jeevadhara Office, Kottayam – 41

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